

FUNERAL MARCH OF A MARIONETTE

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WINIFRED DUKE

FUNERAL MARCH OF A MARIONETTE



“A man hath murdered another. Why so? Either he loveth his wife or his estate, or he would rob another to get maintenance for himself; or he stood in fear to lose something by him; or being wronged he was all on fire to be avenged of him. Would any man commit a murder on no provocation, but only on a delight he takes in murdering? Who will believe it?”

—ST. AUGUSTINE: *Confessions.*

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CHAPTER I

THE RIGHT REVEREND the Bishop of Wurrumpoopa, New Guinea, was billed to appear as the special preacher during the 6.30 Evensong at St. Cleopas, Broadcaster. It was now ten minutes to six, yet the vicar of St. Cleopas, instead of stage-managing the final arrangements for the episcopal arrival was speeding in the opposite direction towards the house of the Bishop's intended hostess. In his pocket reposed an urgent summons from the lady, requesting, nay, insisting upon his presence before the Bishop, due by the 2.27 train from St. Pancras, should reach Broadcaster station.

The vicar, the Reverend Hugh Singleton, M.A., was thirty-three years of age, the husband of one wife, the father of two children, and the brother-in-law of the prettiest girl in Broadcaster. His parish was a large and strenuous one, with a congregation consisting of all sorts and conditions. Broadcaster was a big manufacturing town, containing mills and factories, streets far flung to the edge of wide and beautiful moors, as well as docks and warehouses. These last gave a scrambling, sinister aspect to the place, being the resort of foreigners, undesirable aliens, and bad characters galore.

The town was well supplied with churches. In addition to St. Cleopas there was St. Mary Magdalene's, where the vicar called himself a Modernist. Already he had pronounced the Old Testament to be a series of fables and was beginning seriously to doubt the existence of God. There was also St. Michael and All Angels, whose rector was an Anglo-Catholic. He went about his parish in a purple cassock trailing on the ground, wore in church a surplice reaching only to his thighs, likewise a biretta, some people declared in bed. Broadcaster also boasted a Baptist chapel, and a Roman Catholic place of worship, which, if one entered without knowing what it was, was quite easy to mistake for St. Michael and All Angels. St. Cleopas was moderate in its views. There was sufficient ritual to satisfy the advanced, and yet not too much to shock the old-fashioned church-goer. The music was a special feature of the service, and the congregation was enabled to give Mammon a look-in in the shape of whist-drives, choir-excursions, socials, and activities with scouts and guides. The wealthiest member of St. Cleopas, the giver of large monies, the uncrowned patroness, was Mrs. Garnett of Broadcaster Manor, the lady about to entertain the Bishop of Wurrumpoopa, he being, incidentally, her deceased husband's nephew.

Hugh Singleton was a Broadcaster man, born and bred. He had been educated at Broadcaster Grammar School, and after taking Holy Orders served several years as curate of St. Cleopas before becoming its vicar. Eight years prior to the beginning of this story he had married Ethel, elder daughter of Dr. Fenchurch, the most popular practitioner Broadcaster had ever known. The doctor left

two daughters, and since his death, three years previously, the younger, Peggy, had made her home at St. Cleopas' vicarage with her sister and brother-in-law.

Broadcaster openly wondered why she had not long since had a home of her own. Surely, after nine years, she must have broken off her engagement to Archie Garnett? The late John Garnett, a wealthy manufacturer, had bought Broadcaster Manor and died there, a hard-headed, grasping, obstinate old man, who worshipped money, married money, and finally departed, with extreme reluctance, to where money could neither avail nor accompany him. His first wife presented him with a son, Archibald, and died whilst the boy was still a child. To his father's annoyance Archie inherited his mother's fortune unconditionally as soon as he came of age. Within a year of that event old Garnett, allowing himself his first holiday since his honeymoon, returned from it with a second Mrs. Garnett about whom speculation, none too charitable, persisted to this day. It was not Mrs. Garnett's fault that she should look like an actress or a woman with a past. In reality she was the daughter of a well-to-do tradesman, and, when old Garnett met her at a seaside hotel, the widow of a successful funeral proprietor. Her first husband had had the spitefulness to deprive her of a large slice of her income if she re-married, and Mrs. Symonds, directly she became Mrs. Garnett, resolved that her second spouse should commit no such error of taste. She and her stepson disliked one another from the start. When he announced his engagement to pretty, penniless Peggy Fenchurch Mrs. Garnett was furious, particularly as it was the one action of his son's of which the old man showed strong approval. The couple were so young—Archie twenty-four, Peggy nineteen—that Dr. Fenchurch wished them to wait a year or two, and Archie, idling at home, to take up some profession. A few months afterwards John Garnett had died suddenly from apoplexy, leaving everything unconditionally to his wife. His son's name was not mentioned in the will, a will, people noted, drawn up only a week previous to the testator's death. Archie accused his stepmother of having poisoned his father's mind against him and flung out of the house, vowing never to return. Directly afterwards he had sailed for Australia and Broadcaster had not seen him since.

Her brother-in-law knew little of Peggy's side of the matter. Dr. Fenchurch had refused to let her marry Archie and go out to Australia, but for the first year letters came regularly from him and she continued to wear her engagement-ring. Then her sister's marriage left her alone with her father who was in failing health, the letters ceased, and in process of time the ring disappeared. The Singletons knew that she had had other offers of marriage, including one from Hugh's fellow-curate, and another, persistently renewed, from Dr. Fenchurch's successor, but Peggy declined them all. After her father's death she settled down at the vicarage, busy, efficient, to all appearances happy. The vicar often wondered what he should do without her.

Yesterday, for example, had been the weekly Mothers' Meeting, over which Ethel ought to have presided. Instead, she had dispatched Peggy to deputize for her and stayed curled up on the sofa with the latest novel by Aubrey Pouncebox. The 'vicar was not a bookish man, but he had gathered from a recent review in the *Church Chimes* that Aubrey Pouncebox would not be precisely suitable for reading aloud at a Mothers' Meeting. His sales were enormous, only rivalled by those of Horace Purplepatches—the Horace Purplepatches—whose *Taken in Adultery* (Sewage & Slush, Ltd., 7/6 net), was now in its nine hundred and eighty-fifth thousand. Enemies, rivals, and detractors declared this to be due to the novel's having been attacked before publication by the Bishop of Bootle. To those who roundly accused him of having read the book himself his lordship replied loftily that the title was all-sufficient for his strong action. Without any such send-off Aubrey Pouncebox's works were extremely popular. *The Smell in the Study* had enjoyed a great vogue, and been rapidly followed by *The Man with the Red Nose*. Hugh Singleton wondered idly whether the Bishop of Wurrumpoopo would have banned either of these. He, too, was an author, but only in a small and strictly suitable capacity. A presentation copy of his recently published book of Advent addresses, *What Thank have Ye?* reposed in a drawer in the vicar's study. Truth to tell, he had found them heavy going.

His brows were knit as he hurried along the steep, tree-shaded road beyond which was situated Broadcaster Manor, now Mrs. Garnett's property. It was eminently characteristic of her to send for her clergyman and never to dream of offering him any means of conveyance. The summons had arrived most inconveniently, within half an hour of the Bishop's arrival and Evensong. Why this urgency, one might almost call it alarm? Was the Bishop not coming after all? The vicar's forehead grew damp. In that case he would have to preach, and there was little or no time to prepare a sermon. Surely, in such an event, the Bishop would have telegraphed to him? They were old friends.

The Bishop was, as has been said, old Garnett's nephew, his sister's son. An only child, deprived of both parents in infancy, he had spent most of his early youth at Broadcaster Manor. The first Mrs. Garnett was very much attached to him, and despite a difference of five years in age and a world-wide one in outlook and temperament, he and his cousin Archie had been good comrades. The physical resemblance between them as boys was very strong, so much so that they were frequently taken not only for brothers but for one another. The second Mrs. Garnett had obviously and openly preferred her husband's nephew to his son and loudly lamented his departure from his native land. At twenty-three Gilbert Gifford had taken Holy Orders, worked for two years in an East London parish, and then left England for the Foreign Mission field. His clerical promotion had seemed meteoric in its rapidity. At thirty-eight he was a bishop, and returning home on furlough had promised

his friend that he would preach his first sermon on English soil in St. Cleopas.

They had all been playmates together, the Bishop, Hugh Singleton, Archie Garnett, and the Fenchurch girls. The vicar sighed a little as he recalled the happy days that were gone for ever. Well, well, it was all ended.

Here he found himself mistaken. It was only just beginning.

CHAPTER II

THE SEPTEMBER SUN was gilding the empty fields as the vicar left the last house behind. In the distance he could see Broadcaster Manor, a massive, ivy-draped pile, approached by a lodge gate and a long avenue. The road up which he had toiled ran away abruptly and curved in descending loops to the town, the road along which the Bishop would presently be bowled in luxury and comfort. Hugh Singleton, heated and irritable, was nearing the lodge gates when he saw them opened to permit the carriage (Mrs. Garnett hated cars, having once been involved in a bad motor-accident) to pass through on its journey to the station to fetch the Bishop. The sight was an unpleasant reminder of Mrs. Garnett's selfishness. Why on earth could she not have let him and the Bishop drive up together? Why had she been so insistent that she must see him *before* the Bishop arrived? He walked up the drive in a thoroughly bad temper.

The door was opened immediately by Wade, thus suggesting that she had been stationed there in readiness to admit him. Wade was a middle-aged spinster who had lived at Broadcaster Manor for years as housekeeper to old Garnett, and been his right hand during the interregnum between his first and second wives. She now acted as maid to the latter. As boy, man, curate, and vicar Hugh Singleton remembered Wade, and to his recollection she had always looked exactly the same. An upright, lean woman, with a yellow, inscrutable face, she reminded an onlooker (if you were at all imaginative) of a locked door, an impassable wall, a shuttered house. The vicar knew nothing of her past or her people. She came to his church, although a sister, married to a plumber, and living in a slummy part of Broadcaster, was a Dissenter, together with her husband and family. Their youngest boy, Zackery Tann, the vicar regarded as a brand snatched from the burning. He had joined St. Cleopas for no apparent reason, was the naughtiest youth in Peggy's Sunday-school class, and sang in the choir, where his voice was exquisite, but his influence the reverse of good.

Wade saved the caller the formality of inquiring whether Mrs. Garnett were at home. She relieved him of his hat and stick, and

without a word ushered him down a long hall, slippery with parquet, heavy with antlers and dark paintings, and into a room at the far end. This was Mrs. Garnett's boudoir, a silken, over-furnished apartment, looking out on a side of the garden. Being the last week in September the garden was a trifle past its best. The uncharitable thought crossed the vicar's mind that the same might be said regarding the lady who at once came forward to receive him.

Mrs. Garnett was tall and dark, with a narrow white face, lit up by flashing dark eyes. At all times she had a hectic, tragedy-queen appearance, giving the totally false impression that she must be fast, disreputable, the owner of a murky past, the victim of blackmail. In sober reality, with the exception of two exceedingly dishonourable actions, of one of which she was about to unbosom herself in every detail, her career had been smooth, successful, and entirely open to inspection. Too restless to sit down, she had kept pacing to and fro, scattering in her erratic progress a trail of small articles about the thick carpet. The vicar stooped mechanically to pick up a fragile handkerchief. He was glad of the excuse not to look at her for he both disliked and distrusted her. Although obliged to endure her patronage as his wealthiest parishioner he often writhed under it.

As he laid down the scented wisp amongst a litter of pretty toys placed carelessly on a small inlaid table a most incongruous object in their midst caught his eye. It was a long knife, obviously a foreign curiosity, removed from its rightful companions, the grim collection of weapons which old John Garnett had treasured in his smoking-room. The clergyman's mind automatically registered the thing's presence, but his thoughts were bent upon his errand. His first words sounded curt and unsympathetic.

"You sent for me, Mrs. Garnett, and I have come—at very great inconvenience. May I remind you that I can only give you a few minutes, as the Bishop should be here in a quarter of an hour——"

She broke into his sentence, not rudely or abruptly, but with the air of a woman whose mind was so occupied by her own affairs that every trivial incident had its bearing upon them.

"That's just it." Her voice was high, bordering on shrillness. "It's on the Bishop's account—partly. I said that I must see you before he came."

"So your note mentioned."

She continued her walk, jerking her head at the vicar over her shoulder, throwing the sentences at him like small, sharp stones.

"Before he comes I've something to tell you. You must promise never to repeat it. It's—it's private, almost under the seal of the confessional. They do have confessions in the Church of England, don't they?"

The vicar thought of his ritualistic neighbour, the rector of St. Michael and All Angels, whom he particularly disliked. "In that case, Mrs. Garnett, you had better go to Mr. Sievewright, or Father Ignatius Xavier, as I believe he calls himself."

"Oh, no, no." Her tone changed almost to a whimper. "He

has nothing to do with it. You have. I——” She broke off and flung herself down on a couch. “Mr. Singleton, I shall begin at the beginning, and then perhaps you will forgive me and advise me?”

One word struck especially on his ear. “Why ‘forgive’?” he demanded.

“Because”—her teeth were set in the handkerchief now, her eyes staring over at him—“I’ve wronged you—made use of your name in a way that I shouldn’t.” She halted, but as he gave her no assistance, went on: “Mr. Singleton, did you never wonder why my stepson stayed away so long, and—and never writes to Peggy?”

The vicar’s shrugged shoulders were eloquent of his dislike at her reviving the old story. “I should not dream of questioning Peggy or of interfering with her private affairs.” He spoke stiffly. “I imagine that she still considers herself engaged to Archie.”

“Oh, she would, she does. Peggy’s staunch,” muttered the other woman. She turned and faced her companion squarely. “Mr. Singleton, it’s my doing. I wrote and told Archie that Peggy had married you.”

In the awful silence which followed her confession a little gilt clock on the mantelpiece struck six.

“Mrs. Garnett, how dared you——” the vicar began.

“Wait!” She caught back her breath. “I’ll tell you everything. You know that Archie never liked me—never. From the very first moment that his father brought me to this house—his second wife—he thwarted me and hated me.” Her words tripped over one another in her venom, her passionate anxiety to excuse herself. “Why shouldn’t my husband leave his money to me?” she asked inconsequently. “Archie had his own mother’s——”

“I understand that you had your first husband’s.” The interruption was cold and disgusted.

“Not all of his. If I married again I lost most of it.” She was vehement in her denials. “Well, of course Archie never forgave that will of his father’s, leaving him out. He hated me more than ever, and—and when he said that he would go to Australia and work, I—I was thankful.”

Her listener controlled himself sufficiently to ask: “Why should poor Peggy suffer for your dislike of Archie?”

“Can’t you see that it was their engagement which kept him here and would be certain to bring him back?” Her eyes flashed scorn for such denseness. “It had to end. I knew that Peggy would never disobey her father, but directly he died there would be nothing to prevent the marriage. Archie needn’t work. He would come back here. I—I found out where he was, and I told Peggy that he had asked me to tell her not to write for a bit as it was some dreadful up-country place where he mightn’t get her letters——” She broke off. “Then, when you married Ethel, I wrote and told him that it was Peggy.”

“And he believed you?” The vicar’s lip curled. He had thought better of Archie Garnett.

"He mayn't have believed me, but he believed the local paper." Her eyes were mere slits. "You know what a badly-printed rag it is. There was a picture of the wedding-group—oh, you've seen it—don't you remember?—the faces just smudges, might be anybody. By a stroke of luck the Fenchurch girls have the same initials. Your wife is Ethel Mary and Peggy is Elisabeth Maud. I don't know why they call her Peggy," she ended resentfully.

"A pet name." He spoke mechanically. "Well?"

"There was a line underneath, saying that it was the wedding of the Reverend Hugh Singleton and Miss E. M. Fenchurch, daughter of Dr. Fenchurch. I cut the photograph out and sent it to Archie with a letter, telling him that Peggy had asked me to write and tell him as she was afraid to do it herself. I told him all about the wedding"—her lips sneered softly—"and how sweet Peggy looked, and that everybody was saying she would make an ideal clergyman's wife. So they did at the time," she added fiercely.

The vicar remembered the comments and shoulder-shrugs levelled at his choice of Ethel Fenchurch when their engagement was given out. He felt all the more furious with Mrs. Garnett because he had never had the smallest intention of marrying Peggy. Ethel, with her love of luxury, her laziness, her utter unsuitability as a parson's helpmate had been the one woman for him, as Archie Garnett had been the only man for Peggy. He managed to control himself and ask:

"What did Archie say? Did he reply?"

"Oh, yes." Her tone was dry. "He wrote and thanked me and gave me a message for Peggy. Needless to say, I never delivered it."

"What was it, Mrs. Garnett?"

Her white face quivered. "Only to wish her luck, and to say she'd chosen the better man." Her glance measured him. "Of course he never wrote to her, and Peggy was too proud to write to a man whose letters had just stopped without a word."

Hugh Singleton checked himself on the verge of calling Mrs. Garnett what she was—a devil. It struck him that she must have had a tremendously strong motive for wanting Archie Garnett kept from returning to Broadcaster—a motive stronger than mere dislike of her stepson. Was it a guilty conscience? Could it be that she found herself unable to endure the sight of the person whom everybody considered that she had defrauded of his inheritance? She stood up, biting her lip as she awaited her clergyman's verdict. Instead, he put a question.

"Why do you tell me all this now, Mrs. Garnett? It may not be too late to undo the terrible harm which you have worked, but why should you suddenly acknowledge it? And"—a paralysing reminder visited him—"what has all this to do with the Bishop?"

Her eyes shot him a glare of measureless contempt. How dense men were!

"That's just it." Her voice sounded husky and strangled. "I sent for you—I told you everything—because I want your advice

before Gilbert comes. He—he isn't coming alone. *Archie is coming with him.*"

She uttered the last words in a gasping whisper, leaning forward as she spoke them. Her look was hunted, ghastly.

The vicar started. "How do you know? Has he written to you?"

"Only a postcard—a dreadfully profane, wicked postcard. If Gilbert saw it I'm surprised at his allowing Archie to send it." She darted to the little table on which lay the knife and extracted a crumpled square. "There! Read that. I wonder he wasn't struck dead. I wish he had been!"

The vicar murmured an automatic "Hush—sh!" and proceeded to peruse the offending intimation. It was an ordinary postcard, bearing a London postmark, and written in Archie Garnett's bold hand, which Hugh Singleton knew well. The message ran as follows:

"The Bishop of Wurrumpoopo will arrive (D.V.) at Broadcaster Manor on Sunday, 27th inst., at 6.15 p.m. He will be accompanied by his cousin, Mr. Archibald Everard Garnett. 'For this your son was dead, and is alive again; was lost, and is found.'"

There was an electrical silence. The vicar laid down the card and gazed at Mrs. Garnett.

"How very irreverent!" he murmured feebly.

"Irreverent? It's blasphemous! 'Exactly like Archie!'" She snatched the card and tore it up into vicious strips. "It came by the last post yesterday and the idiots never gave it to me. Walters brought it in at five this evening with some lie about its being overlooked, and hoped it wasn't important. *Important!* Pah! It may mean my whole future. If I'd got it earlier I might have found some means of stopping him."

"But I don't understand why he should come with the Bishop."

"Neither do I. Gilbert's letters never mentioned him. Evidently they met out there, or came home in the same ship. Gilbert will know about your marriage—you and he correspond, don't you?—and he'll have told Archie the truth. Anyway, he's bound to learn it in Broadcaster."

Her face was livid. The vicar had no comment to make, no consolation to offer. He moved towards the door.

"Mrs. Garnett, you wished for my advice." He halted, fronting her. "I have only this to say to you. You can undo some of the wicked harm for which you are responsible by confessing everything to your stepson and my sister-in-law. You ought to make Archie some restitution for his father's unjust will. Archie is generous. He may forgive you for depriving him and Peggy of eight years' happiness, although you cannot give either back those years. I counsel you to tell him the truth directly he comes."

Mrs. Garnett took a step nearer, her eyes blazing, her face distorted. The vicar felt a physical fear and repulsion. At the moment she looked a woman capable of anything. The rattle of carriage wheels sounded on the drive.

"Oh, if only he might never come!" she screamed. She flung

out her arms. "I'd give a thousand pounds, I'd give my whole fortune, to anyone who'd stop him from coming to this house!"

Her voice, loud, awful, could be heard by ears outside the room. The vicar saw the door move and wondered whether it had been closed during the interview. Wade appeared from behind a tall screen. It was so high that she might easily have come in earlier and stood there without either his or Mrs. Garnett's knowledge.

"The carriage has returned, madam." She addressed her mistress in smooth, measured accents. "The Bishop sent a message that as the train was late he preferred to go straight to the church."

Mrs. Garnett licked her dry lips. "Did—did the Bishop come alone, Wade?"

"I could not say, madam. The luggage is just being brought in."

She turned desperately to the vicar. Instead of comment, he voiced a request. "As the carriage is there, may it drive me down? I am very pressed for time, and if the Bishop has arrived——"

"Oh, I suppose so." The permission was utterly ungracious. "But send it back at once, please. I am going to church this evening. I want to hear dear Gilbert preach."

CHAPTER III

THE VICAR WAS driven back in a state of great physical comfort, counterbalanced by extreme mental perturbation.

The revelation into Mrs. Garnett's character and conduct, the dishonourable part that she had played in separating Archie Garnett and Peggy Fenchurch, added to his wrath at the shameless way in which she had used his marriage to further his own ends. Hugh Singleton was almost sorry for her when he visualized the approaching and inevitable interview between her and her stepson. Archie had inherited as his sole legacy from his father a slice of the old man's exceedingly hot temper. There would be argument, recriminations, abuse, possibly physical violence. The clergyman shuddered as those wild words recurred to him. "I'd give a thousand pounds, I'd give my whole fortune, to anyone who'd stop him from coming to this house!" They had sounded like a challenge to Fate.

Yet who—or what—would prevent Archie Garnett from walking into Broadcaster Manor and confronting his stepmother with her treachery? At this precise moment he was probably at the vicarage, closeted with Peggy, swift to make her atonement for their spoiled happiness. There could be no further obstacle in the way of the marriage now, unless—a cold fear visited the vicar—Archie should have married in Australia. But in that case why had he come home? It was too late for reparation, too futile for explanation.

Broadcaster Manor was built on high ground, well above the

town. From it the house could be approached in two directions. One was a walk across uncultivated moor, considerably shorter than the road which the vicar had taken. The other, the road itself, descended gradually past scattered houses to where the shops and streets of Broadcaster proper began. The church and vicarage of St. Cleopas were in a main part, and could be reached by continuing this same road or by taking a short cut through something of a slum. Mean little brick houses, with sooty back-gardens, clustered together. The shriek of whistles and the rumbling of trains sounded day and night, for the railway ran close at hand. There was a dark slant under a railway-arch, soon to be the most popular spot in Broadcaster for the news-monger, the morbid, and the sensation-lover. . . .

Hugh Singleton thrust his head out of the carriage window and directed the coachman to drive *via* the slum. His watch told him that it was now a quarter past six and he must lose no time. Already he could hear the imperative summons of St. Cleopas' bell, defying the sweeter chimes of St. Mary Magdalene's and the aggressive clang of St. Michael and All Angels.

The carriage deposited him before St. Cleopas, a big building of cheery red brick. The vicarage, a sober grey stone house, sat beside the church. He hastened round to the vestry, puckering his brow as sounds of unaccustomed and (he feared) unseemly mirth struck upon his ear. He entered, to find his six sidesmen, the organist, the choir-master, the vergers, and an entranced circle of open-mouthed choir-boys, all hanging on the words of a big, much sunburned man, wearing episcopal robes. Story and laughter came to an abrupt halt as the Reverend Hugh Singleton appeared on the threshold.

The Bishop, with a roar of welcome, dashed across and smote the vicar on the back. "Hugh!" he shouted. "Hugh, old horse! Well, this is good!"

The vicar, recovering slowly from this friendly smiting, wrung a large, leathery hand, "My lord, I—".

"Oh, stow that!" interrupted the Bishop. He grinned, showing splendid teeth. "Why, you and I always used each other's names, Hugh. You haven't forgotten mine, I hope?"

"Gilbert?" ventured the vicar. He ducked hastily to avoid another clap.

A curious look—was it relief or mere amusement?—flitted for a second across the Bishop's face. "That's right. No ceremony with this child. I say, Hugh, have I changed much? It's nine years since we met."

"More like fifteen or sixteen." The vicar smiled. How unlike Gilbert, the meticulous, the scrupulously accurate about dates!

"Rot! You mean nine."

"No, no. You're thinking of Archie. He left Broadcaster nine years ago, but it hasn't seen you since you were at that East End parish. I was at St. Adrian's Theological College the time your uncle and aunt went up to see you off when you sailed for—Brisbane, wasn't it?"

The Bishop, nodding heartily, agreed that it *was* Brisbane. "I suppose I've changed," he continued. "You haven't, though."

The vicar murmured something polite, inwardly thinking that Gilbert had altered almost out of recognition. Hugh Singleton remembered a tall, pale, studious boy, instead of this robust, weather-beaten, overwhelming man. The likeness to Archie Garnett, allowing for the nine years which had elapsed since the vicar had last seen him, was stronger than ever. He remarked upon it.

"Archie? Oh, er, yes." The Bishop crimsoned. "On the voyage everyone mistook us for each other. There was one little bit of skirt dead nuts on him. Hung about the cabin stairs one dark night and kissed *me*. By George! when she found it wasn't Archie——"

"I think the single bell is beginning." The vicar, conscious of the sidesmen's raised eyebrows, the sniggers of the choirmen, and the suppressed giggling amongst the choir, made an anguished plunge for his cassock and surplice. "Boys, get to your places. Mr. Jones, please start the voluntary. Where is Archie, Gilbert? Did you arrive together?"

"Yes. He said he had to go and see somebody." The Bishop crossed over to his friend. "Hugh"—his voice was inaudible to the others in the vestry—"may I come to supper to-night? I want to see Ethel and Peggy."

"Delighted." The vicar cast a mental glance over the Sunday evening supper-table. Cold beef, pickles, a salad, a shape made by Peggy's clever hands, a clean tablecloth. In any case he need not be ceremonious with an old acquaintance, bishop or no bishop. "But what about Mrs. Garnett?" he asked. "Won't she expect you?"

An expression came over the Bishop's face which caused Hugh Singleton to start. All its good humour and jollity disappeared. The lips were shut together, the eyes stern, unsmiling. "Plenty of time, Hugh. I've—rather a crow to pluck with my—Mrs. Garnett."

"You mean about Archie and Peggy?"

A pause. "About Peggy—yes. Do *you* know?"

Hugh Singleton said reluctantly: "Mrs. Garnett sent for me this evening to tell me. I've just come from her. That's why I wasn't here to receive you, Gilbert. I ought to apologize."

"There's no necessity. Of course Archie's postcard would send her into a panic, and she wanted her clergyman's absolution and advice." He laughed, a soundless, rather cruel laugh. It slightly shocked Hugh Singleton. So Gilbert had evidently read the postcard and approved of it.

The bell stopped. The procession, duly marshalled, was ready to start. The Bishop, prepared to head it, bounded up and placed himself before the cross-bearer, in private life a prosperous joiner. There was a universal gasp.

"Ahem! Not there, my lord." The principal churchwarden, with enormous courage, touched the episcopal shoulder. "Your lordship walks at the end of the procession."

"Hang it! I thought that a bishop always took precedence——" He broke off and scuttled to the rear, as scarlet as his hood.

Two of the choirmen, old inhabitants of Broadcaster, whispered together as the white-robed couples filed into the brightly-lit church. The processional hymn was being lifted, with more enthusiasm than aspirates.

*Come, ye thankful people, come,
Raise the song of 'arvest 'ome.*

"Queer, that. You'd think a bishop 'ud have known where to go."

"Perhaps it's different in New Guinea. He's got a wonderful memory, though. Doesn't forget old friends. Nearly shook my hand off and wanted to know was I still walking out with Kitty Hood."

"And you married to her sister this five year." The other grinned sarcastically. "I'd call his memory convenient, not good. Why, bless me, he didn't even seem to remember the name of that church in London he went to—St. Dunstan's, Bridge Street—where my brother was organist, nor my brother neither."

"Oh, well, we haven't all got your memory. Don't forget that five shillings you owe me."

It is unnecessary to describe the service in detail. Anyone reading this book who has attended Evensong will know what the procedure is like. Those who have not may repair the omission by going next Sunday. Suffice it to say that everything went smoothly and unobtrusively, that the singing was hearty, and the prospect of the Bishop's sermon caused a pleasant feeling of anticipation in every bosom throughout the crowded church. At the beginning of the Psalms, Mrs. Garnett, erect, exquisitely and expensively dressed, entered, followed by Wade, and made her way to her accustomed pew. The vicar, glancing at her on his progress to the lectern, began to think that the scene of the afternoon must have been a dream. She looked so composed, so remote, so utterly removed from treachery and trickery. Then he remembered the Bishop's face when he had spoken of her. Mrs. Garnett would find no advocate in her husband's nephew.

The clerical eye took in the vicarage pew. Its sole occupant was his wife, which meant that their one servant was out. Peggy would be putting the children to bed, laying the supper-table, and attending to the kitchen fire. He wondered whether all these tasks would remain neglected if Archie had, as he shrewdly surmised, gone to the vicarage. "Here beginneth the twelfth verse of the sixteenth chapter——"

At a quarter past seven the great moment of the evening arrived. The Bishop, tall, stately, walked down and mounted the pulpit steps. The vicar noticed that in one hand was clutched a ball of manuscript. So Gilbert did not preach without notes? The congregation Amen'd and sat down. The text rolled forth.

"The fifteenth chapter of St. Luke's Gospel, and the twenty-fourth verse. 'For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.'"

Hugh Singleton buried his face in his handkerchief. Was it a coincidence, or deliberate malice? The latter idea evidently struck Mrs. Garnett. With a purposed rudeness she rose, collected Wade, her prayer-book, her expensive hand-bag, and walked down the aisle, out of the church door. The Bishop continued to preach as though she did not exist.

It was a remarkable sermon, fine thoughts, reasoned arguments, noble imaginings. The matter was far superior to the delivery as the Bishop merely read his manuscript, with no attempt at elocution or effect. Broadcaster liked it best when he put it away, folded his arms, and speaking from his heart, said:

"The prodigal son came home. I have come home. It is home to me because I lived here as a little boy, and I've never loved any place so well. Often, thousands of miles from Broadcaster, I've thought about it, and the Broadcaster people. There'll have been heaps of changes since I was here last, but many of you won't have forgotten me, and I think will be glad to see me back. I'm coming round to visit lots of old friends, and I know I'll find my welcome in your homes."

The service concluded with one awkward hitch. Choir and congregation waited expectantly for the Bishop to give the Blessing. In response to coughs, nods, and signals he presented a blank countenance. Ultimately the vicar bestowed a benediction on his flock which, as the choir filed out, sang with more heartiness than h's:—

*As pants the 'art for cooling streams,
When 'eated in the chase——"*

It was a hymn not precisely suited to Harvest Thanksgiving, but afforded such an opportunity for the display of Zackery Tann's top notes.

In the vestry the Bishop was peeled out of his episcopal robes, to his palpable relief. He began to talk to the choir-boys, telling them amusing anecdotes, none of which had a particularly spiritual or missionary flavour. One of the choirmen asked him a question about the smuggling of opium into Wurrumpoopo by Chinese coolies. The Bishop had very little information to offer on the subject. It did not appear to interest him especially and he turned back to the choir-boys. "I suppose none of you chaps have ever seen a Chink?" he inquired jestingly.

One or two had amongst the crowd of foreign sailors who came ashore to drink and quarrel when their ship was in the docks. Another remembered a Chinese section at a missionary exhibition. Zackery Tann suddenly piped up: "Please, my lord, we've got a Chinaman lodgin' with us."

"Have you, indeed?" The Bishop beamed. "I hope he is a Christian, my lad?"

Zackery grinned, shuffled, and did not know. "The Chink kept a laundry. There was two of 'em."

His information was cut short by a message. The vicar was wanted. Hugh Singleton went away, returning shortly afterwards with a face of great gravity. He drew the Bishop aside.

"Gilbert"—his words were whispered—"a terrible thing has happened. They have found a body under the archway. You remember it—not far from here? A stranger, and—and from the contents of the pockets they think it may be Archie."

The Bishop became the hue of a surplice. "Archie? Dead? How did it happen? How shocking!"

"He appears to have been stabbed. I heard nothing about a weapon. The police are there, and they want you to come."

The Bishop obeyed. In the deepening September dusk he hastened by the vicar's side along a mean street, lit with flickering gas-lamps, to the dark and ominous mouth of the railway arch. The news had spread, and a gaping, curious crowd was being kept back by two policemen. They made way for the Bishop who walked quickly up to the motionless thing beside the damp brickwork. A moment's brief inspection sufficed. He turned away with set mouth.

"Yes, it is the poor fellow," he muttered. "What an appalling business!"

CHAPTER IV

HUGH SINGLETON'S first thought was of Peggy. Poor, poor girl, how bitter an ending to her far-off love-dream! It seemed a doubly cruel blow of Fate that on the very threshold of a happy re-union, when misunderstandings were about to be wiped away and her lover restored to her, death should have stepped in. Whose hand had dealt the fatal stroke? What hidden foe had watched for his chance—and taken it? The crime must have been committed rapidly, close to a crowded part of the town. Had there been no cry for help, no realization of his doom in the very moment of its falling upon the hapless Archie? What secret enemy had done this? Surely Archie had had no enemies? Vainly the vicar strove to shut his eyes to the vision of a stately, offended back receding down the aisle, to close his ears to a woman's passionate and despairing appeal. "I'd give a thousand pounds, I'd give my whole fortune, to anyone who'd stop him from coming to this house!" Who had heard—and answered her? Well, Archie would never come to Broadcaster Manor now, except in a coffin.

"This is a terrible thing, Gilbert," he told the Bishop. The body had been removed to the mortuary. The two men were rapidly retracing their steps towards St. Cleopas' vicarage. A heavy shower of rain had fallen during the service. The lamps were reflected in blurred splashes on the shining pavements.

"I wish you'd walk faster," snapped the Bishop.

"Why? Oh, I forgot. You're coming back to supper." How disgustingly heartless of Gilbert to remember that such a thing as food existed!

"Hang supper!" The Bishop scowled ferociously. "I want to get to the house and break it to Peggy before some fool comes bursting in with the news."

"It's a terrible thing." Mechanically the vicar repeated his own words. "I—I can't realize it. Archie, of all people! Why, I shouldn't have thought that he had an enemy in the world." He set his lips upon the admission: "Except Mrs. Garnett."

The recollection of her made him realize that the intelligence of her stepson's death would be hideously welcome. "What about your aunt?" he ventured diffidently. "Oughtn't she to be told?"

"She'll hear soon enough." The Bishop spoke curtly and bitterly.

Hugh Singleton glanced at the stern face beside him and risked a question. "Then you knew of the—er—reason why Peggy and poor Archie were separated for so long?"

A pause, then a reluctant reply. "I only learned it in Sydney before I came home. Do hurry, Hugh."

Their speed and the Bishop's solicitude were vain things. Ruby Prance, the Singletons' small, snub-nosed maid, whom Peggy had rescued from an undesirable home and was wearily endeavouring to train into some semblance of a decent servant, had been before them. Her Sunday evening out was far too valuable to be spent in church. Rumours of a murder had reached her ears as she stood giggling with a lanky boy-admirer at a street-corner. Both had sped to the scene. Her ghoulish curiosity satisfied, although she was not legally required to return till nine o'clock, Miss Prance had raced back to the vicarage and burst in upon Mrs. Singleton and her sister with the enthralling news.

"Archie Garnett dead—murdered? Nonsense, Ruby!" Ethel frowned down the small bearer of bad tidings. "He's in Australia."

"No, 'e ain't, please, mum. 'E and the Bishop come 'ome together, and 'e's been found with a knife in 'im under the h'archway." Ruby licked her lips.

"I don't believe a word of it." Ethel turned instinctively to her sister. "It's—it's just a silly rumour, Peg," she told her.

They met the vicar and his guest, who arrived a few seconds afterwards, in the hall. Ethel, despite her denials, was sobbing, over-wrought, Ruby hovering in sniffing attendance, and behind them Peggy stood, dark-eyed, tranquil. The Bishop entered the shabby house, with the commonplaces of a child's forgotten skipping-rope trailing on the battered oilcloth, and the half open door of the dining-

room giving a glimpse of a laid supper-table. So Archie had not been here, ran the vicar's dazed conviction, for what girl would go on calmly preparing supper at the re-appearance of a lover whom she had not seen for nine years? He looked at her, beautiful, erect, with no trace of tears in the eyes which were fixed upon the Bishop's working face, and nodded wordlessly in answer to his wife's whispered question as to whether the news were true.

"You've heard, then?" he asked hopelessly. "Gilbert was hurrying to break it to you. You haven't forgotten Gilbert, have you, Peggy dear?"

"Of course not." Her answer was deliberate, unemotional. "Yes, Hugh, Ruby told us. It is very sad. Ruby, I think you had better go and get a handkerchief." She turned to her sister, staring helplessly at the Bishop. "Ethel, Gilbert will be hungry and Hugh very tired. Please come in to supper, everybody."

The vicar concluded somewhat blankly that they had all been mistaken. Peggy could never have cared for Archie when she took his dreadful death so calmly. He drew her hand through his arm and said quietly:

"Will you and Gilbert go on, Ethel? I want to speak to Peggy." She raised no objection, but accompanied him into his shabby study at the back of the hall. It was a comfortless place, with no fire, an untidy desk, and a print of *The Triumph of the Innocents* over the chimney-piece.

"Peggy dear"—he looked away from her face—"we all hope to get to the bottom of this awful business. Forgive me if I pain you, but I want you to tell me—did Archie come here this evening?"

Peggy shook her head. "No, Hugh."

"Nor even send a message?" Good heavens! what had the fool been about? He should have gone straight to her, explained everything, grovelled for her forgiveness of his doubt of her, instead of wandering into the town and letting himself be murdered. Then it struck the vicar that perhaps Peggy's calm and self-control were a mere mask. She did not know what he himself had only learned that evening, how Mrs. Garnett's treachery and untruthfulness had sundered her and Archie. No doubt the poor girl felt as though she had no right to mourn him.

"We can't do anything to-night." She struck across his bewildered thoughts. "Please go and have your supper, Hugh, and I think you had better get Ethel to invite the Bishop—Gilbert—to stay here for the night."

"But he was going to Broadcaster Manor."

"I know, only I feel sure that he'd sooner be with us." She moved towards the door. "I'll go and get the spare-room ready. I don't want any supper. I'd rather have something to do."

For the first time her voice quivered. She put up her face to be kissed and hurried away. Hugh Singleton went into the dining-room and somewhat tentatively proposed that the Bishop should remain at the vicarage for the night.

"Peggy's getting you a room ready." He checked his wife's appalled "Oh, Hugh!" with a swift frown. "She made the suggestion. Of course if you'd rather go to Mrs. Garnett's——"

The Bishop, masticating cold beef, looked grimly across at his host. "I'd as soon sleep on the pavement as under the same roof with that woman," he rejoined.

"Why?" Ethel giggled hysterically. "Poor Mrs. Garnett, what's she done? You used to be so fond of her, Gilbert. I wonder has she heard. Did you see her go out of church just at the beginning of your sermon? I suppose she felt faint or something. I always tell Hugh that the side-door ought to be kept open, but he says if it were all the old people would complain of draughts."

Conversation during supper was spasmodic and ill-sustained. The tragedy of the archway hovered in all three minds. Ethel kept breaking into exclamations and speculations concerning it which met with scant encouragement from either of her companions. Eight years of being Hugh Singleton's wife had not yet succeeded in teaching her that Sunday night was a clergyman's worst time, when he felt most fatigued and discouraged. On this occasion, in addition to his ordinary Sunday duties, her husband had had that startling interview with Mrs. Garnett, a strange bishop, albeit an old friend, preaching, and to crown all, a murder. He felt too agitated, too unhappy about Peggy, too sincerely grieved for Archie, to heed his wife's chatter. The Bishop, grim and brooding, scarcely spoke.

In the intervals of seeing to the guest's wants the vicar strove to keep his rebellious thoughts under control. Why had Mrs. Garnett departed so abruptly? Did the coincidence of the text that the Bishop had just given out remind her unpleasantly of the impertinent postcard which she had received, with its disturbing intimation of Archie's return? As Hugh Singleton puzzled a memory came upon him of the little table in her boudoir and its costly, confused litter of pretty things. Amongst them, incongruous, evil, had nestled a curved knife. There had been no trace of the weapon which had killed Archie. Was it possible that she had taken that monstrosity with her to church for some fell purpose, had tracked her victim to the archway, and struck him down? She was a wiry, athletic woman. Hate would have doubled her normal strength. . . .

"What about your luggage, Gilbert?" Ethel asked. How tactless men were! The idea of accepting Hugh's invitation to stop for the night! He had not troubled whether it were offered or endorsed by her, the mistress of the house. They must have very odd, unconventional ways in Wurrumpoopa. Well, it would do Peggy good to find some work to occupy her hands and her thoughts. She and Ruby could make the Bishop's bed and see to everything. Fortunately the spare-room had been turned out the previous week after the departure of Canon Belcher who smoked in bed and dropped candle-grease over a new carpet. Why were the clergy expected to keep open house for stray preachers, be they priest or prelate? If Gilbert didn't want to go to Broadcaster Manor, which was strange, seeing

how well he had always got on with his aunt, why could he not have gone to the Broadcaster Arms? The next thing might be the suggestion from him or Hugh that Archie's funeral should take place from the vicarage. Ethel would put her foot down about *that*.

Supper was nearly over when a message was brought in by Ruby. Mrs. Garnett had sent Wade down and wished the vicar to speak to her. He went out, to discover the tall woman with the inscrutable face waiting in his study. She displayed even less emotion than Peggy had done.

"My mistress has heard the terrible news about Mr. Archibald, sir." Her toneless voice was low and firm. "She is very much distressed, and wishes to know when she may expect the Bishop. She quite thought that he would have come to the house and broken the death to her himself."

The vicar frowned. "The Bishop is remaining here." Wade's raised eyebrows made him furiously conscious of his miserably inadequate domestic staff and meagre *ménage*. "Will you tell Mrs. Garnett this and ask her to send back his luggage?" Wade inclined her head stiffly. "I hope your mistress has recovered," he added carelessly. "I saw her leave the church at the beginning of the sermon. Did she feel faint?"

"Yes, sir. The church was a little close." Wade took up a trim umbrella. "I found her quite herself when I got in after the service—until this news about poor Mr. Archibald arrived."

The words "when I got in after the service" struck sharply on the vicar's attention. "Did you and Mrs. Garnett not return home together?" He asked the question as casually as he could. "You went out of church with her."

A faint shade of surprise crossed Wade's sallow countenance. "No, sir. I walked a little way with my mistress, and then she said she felt so much better that I might go back for the rest of the service. She knew that I was anxious to hear the Bishop preach and my nephew singing in that last hymn. A pity his mother wouldn't come, isn't it? She'd have been proud of him, but Dissenters have very narrow views."

Hugh Singleton's thoughts were far from Zackery Tann or his Dissenting family. So Mrs. Garnett had returned home unaccompanied by Wade? Where was she, between a quarter past seven, when she left St. Cleopas, and eight o'clock, when the dead body of Archie Garnett was found under the railway arch? Had she deliberately brought Wade with her and then got rid of her—for what purpose? Was Wade lying, or did she really leave her mistress and return to the church?

"The Bishop is looking well." He made the remark pleasantly as she walked beside him down the hall.

"Yes, indeed, sir. And what an interesting sermon he gave us. I was in the free seats by the font and I heard every word." A faint smile parted her thin lips. "That was a wonderful story about the missionary and the shark."

So she had been there. She was not lying. The vicar reminded her about the Bishop's luggage and closed the hall-door upon her. Of course he could easily question the servants at Broadcaster Manor as to the exact time of Mrs. Garnett's return, but he disliked having to play the amateur detective. He returned to the dining-room, dissatisfied and perplexed.

CHAPTER V

PEGGY, WITH THE limited intelligence and hindering assistance of Ruby, prepared the guest-chamber for the Bishop and retired to her own room. For once in her life she heartlessly abandoned to her inefficient sister the miseries of washing-up the supper-dishes. Her slackness was rather inexcusable, even in view of her sudden bereavement, as she made no attempt to prepare for the night, shed no tears, but sat on the side of her bed, listening alertly to the noises in the house. The Bishop and Hugh had disappeared into the study. Ethel and the chattering Ruby went first to the scullery and from thence to their respective sleeping-apartments. Mrs. Singleton tapped on her sister's door, offering supper and sympathy, but was neither answered nor admitted. It seemed hours to Peggy before she heard the study door opened, followed by two pairs of footsteps ascending the stairs. They trod past her room and into the spare one, which was just at the end of the passage. Then sounded muffled conversation, more audible good-nights, doors shutting and re-opening to allow cans and boots to be flung out; finally silence. Still she sat on, watchful, waiting, her face wearing no sign of grief or loss.

At last, when the clock on Broadcaster Town Hall had chimed the first quarter after eleven, her vigil was rewarded. In the dead quiet a window creaked and slid up. Peggy tip-toed to her own. It and the spare-room one both looked out, at right-angles to one another, upon a vista of roofs and into the vicarage back-yard. Just below the spare-room window the roof of a coal-shed slanted down. In the shadow of the chintz curtains which she had made herself Peggy saw from the Bishop's window a pair of gaitered legs protruding. These were shortly after followed by the whole of the Bishop's person which balanced precariously upon the ledge. The episcopal form next landed on the coal-shed roof, slithered helplessly over the edge, and eventually found sanctuary in the yard, to the accompaniment of smothered and most unepiscopal language.

Peggy leaned out from her window. The sky was overcast, wind-driven, shifting clouds obscuring a splendid harvest moon, but her

face was plainly visible to the man standing in the yard underneath. He called her name softly.

"Hush-sh! I'll come down." She withdrew, opened her door noiselessly, sped down the shabbily-carpeted stairs, and along the passage to the back-door. The bolts yielded to her trembling fingers. Peggy Fenchurch ran across the yard and into the Bishop's arms.

"Peggy! Darling! *Darling!*"

"Oh, Archie dearest, at last!"

The man who had preached that evening as the Bishop of Wurrumpoopa held her closely, murmuring passionate words and endearments. The years that had been wasted melted away in those exquisite moments. They were together once more, misunderstandings wiped out, each given back to the other. Brokenly he told her all, how he had believed her married to Hugh Singleton, and had only learned the truth through a chance encounter with his cousin Gilbert.

"But I don't understand," protested Peggy helplessly. "Why are you masquerading as Gilbert, and, oh! Archie, aren't we heartless, when he's murdered and everyone thinks it's you?"

"I've never had such an awful evening in my life." The Bishop, as we shall continue to call him, groaned audibly. "I thought Hugh would never get here, and I was mad to see you and explain that I wasn't murdered."

"My heart would have told me, if you had been dead." Her voice was a-tremble with tenderness. "I knew you directly you walked in, and I very nearly laughed. What must Hugh and Ethel think? And how dare you get up in the pulpit and preach a sermon!"

"It was Gilbert's sermon. I only read it." The Bishop chuckled. "Peggy, you were a brick not to say a word." He kissed her again. "I'd no means of letting you know anything, and what a job it's been not to make blunders and give away Gilbert."

"But why should you and Gilbert pretend to be each other?"

Archie Garnett explained briskly. Some few weeks previously he had come across his cousin in Sydney and had learned from him the real facts of Hugh Singleton's marriage. The Bishop was about to return home on furlough, his first visit to England for thirteen years. Impulsively Archie decided to accompany him. A fortnight later, on the evening before their departure, the two met again. The Bishop had seemed worried and pre-occupied. He talked vaguely of "enemies" and "danger". In the end the cousins had exchanged clothes and identities. Archie came on board the *Kangaroo* as the Bishop of Wurrumpoopa and Gilbert as Archie Garnett. "It was a frightfully dull voyage for me," the latter groaned. "I was expected to be interested in nothing but Foreign Missions, and never to touch a card, while Gilbert danced every night and made the running with the prettiest girls. I'd no idea he was such a gay one. Reaction, I suppose, after the life he'd been living all those years."

Peggy choked. "Gilbert—who was always a regular old maid. And now he's dead—murdered. It's awful. What happened when you got here, Archie?"

"Well, naturally I expected to drop the bishop stunt directly we landed, but not a bit of it. All yesterday the beggar kept getting more and more scary and jumpy until at last he got me to promise to preach in his stead and keep up the deception till after the service. He said he had to meet somebody to-night in Broadcaster, but then it would be all right. I don't suppose the poor chap ever imagined that it would end in his getting knifed."

"But who could have done it?"

"Haven't an earthly. We said good-bye at the station, and I came straight to the church in Mrs. Garnett's carriage." He caught her into his arms. "Peggy, Peggy, don't think about Gilbert now. It's sad enough, horribly tragic, but we'll find who did it, and they shall swing for it. Meantime, I've got you again. Peggy, will you ever forgive me—and marry me?"

"Yes, Archie." Her answer was low, her face very sad. "But—you might have trusted me."

"I did, dear. It was the photo in the paper and my stepmother's letter, telling me all about the wedding—your wedding and Hugh's—that convinced me. How was I to know that any woman would be such a fiend? Gilbert was as furious as I was when we both realized what she'd done."

Peggy drew away from him, her eyes wide and fearful. "Archie, did Mrs. Garnett write and tell you that I was married to Hugh?" He nodded reluctantly. "Then I believe she murdered Gilbert, thinking he was you."

"Oh, I say, Peggy!" The idea seemed preposterous.

Peggy Fenchurch nodded fiercely.

"She hated you, and didn't want you ever to come back. She must have known that when you came you'd find out about my not being married and what she'd done. Did she know that you and Gilbert were arriving together?"

Her lover grinned. "I should say so. I intimated my return on a postcard. She ought to have got it yesterday."

Peggy nodded again. "Then she expected you and couldn't face you, so she followed Gilbert and stabbed him, mistaking him for you." Her trembling hands clung to him. "Ethel saw her go out of church. She had time to do it—and the motive. A woman who could separate us in the way she did wouldn't hesitate to—murder."

The little back-yard suddenly felt very cold and eerie. Sinister shadows hung all around, and who could tell what might not lurk in them? The suggestion of Mrs. Garnett's as the hand which had committed the horrible deed of that Sunday night slowly began to be credible, probable, to her stepson's mind. She had done her best to spoil his life and Peggy's. Unhesitatingly she made out her vicar, Archie's boyhood friend, guilty of the theft of the other man's fiancée. Sooner than stand up to a just accusation of her treachery she had silenced her accuser for ever, or so she fondly imagined. He stood dumb, appalled, before his own dark thoughts. Peggy suddenly clutched at his arm.

"Archie, that settles it. *You must go on being the Bishop.*"

"Peggy, I'd do anything in the world for you, but if you knew what I've gone through as a bishop—— Why, the gaiters alone——"

"As long as Mrs. Garnett thinks you're dead you're safe." Peggy spoke firmly. "If she turns out not to have done it, or anyone else is found to have, you can go back to being yourself. It will be quite easy to put the blame on Gilbert. He asked you to do it, to begin with, and he can't contradict you when he's dead." Her voice shook. "Mrs. Garnett's taken eight of our best years from us, but she shan't take you altogether."

Archie moaned hollowly. "But—hang it!—I can't confirm, and—and conduct services, and all that. It isn't cricket. Imagine if I had to marry a couple and then had to own up. They wouldn't be married, and first thing I'll be expected to bury poor Gilbert. I really can't."

"You can—and must." Her tones were fierce and compelling. "If the worst comes to the worst you'll pretend that you're suffering from a nervous breakdown, and say that you've been forbidden to do any work. Then you can resign your see, and—and in time we'll be married——"

"We'll be married at once, Peg o' my heart."

"I must consider the proprieties." Her dimples came and went. "If you take the trouble to think, you'll see that I've only just lost my fiancé in a most terrible and tragic manner. It would be indecent haste if I married the Bishop of Wurrumpoopa, and in any case I always said that I'd never marry a clergyman."

"But there'll be an inquest, and I'll have to tell a pack of lies."

Peggy compressed her pretty lips. "It can't be helped. Something may come out then. By the way, what are you doing, getting out of your window, and in the yard at this time of night?"

"I've got to go back to the church and look for a ring."

"What kind? A wedding-ring, I suppose? 'Men were deceivers ever.' If you've got 'a wife and bairnies three,' like the gentleman in the song——"

"Peggy, don't, even in joke. As though any woman would have taken your place!" His kisses reassured and satisfied her. "No; it's a ring Gilbert gave me to wear, and he said on no account to lose it."

"A rascot?"

"I've no idea. Anyway, it was too loose, and I missed it when we were at supper. Probably it dropped off while I was preaching that confounded sermon. Can you get me the church keys? I'll have to go and hunt for the wretched thing."

The conspirators made their furtive way back into the house. Peggy secured the keys of St. Cleopas which reposed on a peg in the hall, under the vicar's Sunday hat. She conducted her fiancé through the yard and out by the yard door which led into a muddy lane running between adjacent houses. They hurried along it and past

a corner to the church. The Town Hall clock, booming twelve, caused both to leap guiltily.

Inside St. Cleopas all was gloom and ghostliness. The moon's rays scarcely penetrated the blurred brilliance of stained glass. Peggy found her hand seeking Archie's as they tip-toed up the aisle. He produced a small electric torch and flashed its rays over the pulpit floor and steps as well as the neighbourhood of where he had sat or knelt during the service. Nowhere was there any trace of the ring.

In despair the pair retreated to the vestry and searched afresh. Peggy subsided on to a cane-bottomed chair and watched Archie's energetic movements. How bronzed and how much older this splendid lover of her looked! He had gone away a boy, impetuous, smarting under a sense of bitter injury. Now he had come back a man, hardened by a man's work, a man's experiences. She shivered suddenly. Here in this commonplace little room, with its austere furnishings, light woodwork, and rather crude paint, she was alone with the Archie Garnett whom she had not seen for nine years. He might have grown away from her, apart from her. Her eyes were wistful. Did she seem equally a stranger to him?

It was as though he read her troubled thoughts. He got up from his knees (he had been investigating under a press where the vicar kept his cassock and surplice) and came towards her. Very gently he took her in his arms and her fears fled.

"Peggy, dearest, don't look so unhappy. I don't believe that that fiend of a woman—my estimable stepmother—can harm me, but we won't give her the chance. I'll go on for a bit being Gilbert, poor beggar, if it makes your mind any easier."

"Oh, Archie, it does." She clung to him. "I can't help feeling afraid for you—and so helpless. Such a blow out of the dark——" Suddenly he felt her pliant body stiffen in his hold and her finger went up to enjoin silence. "Archie, did you hear anything?"

He shook his head. "Not a sound. You're fanciful, darling."

"No. I'm positive I heard footsteps." She slipped to her feet and went to open the vestry door. "I believe there's someone in the church."

They stood peering across the ghostliness of the empty aisles and pews. There was no sound, but Peggy's accustomed eyes went to the smaller side-door.

"It's not shut. The latch has something wrong with it and it doesn't close at once," she told her companion. "There!" A faint click confirmed her words. "Archie, someone's been here and only just gone 'out.'"

"They mayn't have gone. Perhaps they came in and hid when they heard us in the vestry." He swung the rays of his torch to and fro. "Why doesn't Hugh keep the place locked?"

"He does. He has one set of keys"—she held the purloined bunch up—"and Mr. Potter, the churchwarden, has the other. Good gracious!"

The Bishop had darted from her side and made a plunge into a pew above which a head had incautiously showed itself. A few seconds later he returned, dragging after him a small, scared boy. Amid grim silence Zackery Tann was conducted to the vestry where the Bishop and Peggy confronted the culprit. "What is the meaning of this?" the former demanded.

"Please, my lord, please, Miss Peggy, I wasn't doing no 'arm." The boy sobbed loudly. "I got locked in after the service, and—and I went to sleep in a pew and woke up 'earin' people talkin', and it was you, and—and the Bishop near shook the life out of me," Zackery concluded resentfully.

"The Bishop missed something valuable and we came to look for it." Peggy spoke sternly. "Did you hear what we were saying?"

"Please, Miss Peggy, I was asleep."

Peggy frowned in perplexity. Had the boy told the truth? If he had only just entered the church and at once taken refuge in the pew on hearing people coming out of the vestry very little harm was done. The side-door closing soon after she and Archie had emerged confirmed this view. They had said nothing compromising in church, but any eavesdropper who had chosen to listen to their conversation in the vestry must know that this bishop was not the real one. She felt uncertain and suspicious.

"Turn out your pockets," ordered the Bishop sternly.

The converted Dissenter obeyed. The usual appalling collection beloved of boys emerged: string, wire, a broken bird's egg, a mass of sticky toffee, a padlock, and some foreign stamps. There were no keys, which lent colour to Zackery's assertion that he had found himself locked in ever since the close of the service. As he was invariably the first choir-boy to shed cassock and surplice and escape into the open air directly he decently could Peggy felt that the tale was rather thin. "How did you manage to get locked in?" she inquired forensically.

Zackery sniffed. "Saw me aunt—'er wot's maid up at Mrs. Garnett's—sittin' by the font, and knew I'd 'ave to walk 'ome with 'er," he mumbled. "So I 'ung about and didn't know as they'd locked up, and I got awful frightened and 'ungry and that lonely. Please, Miss Peggy, can I go now?"

"I suppose so. Your mother'll be anxious." Peggy spoke coldly.

"Not 'er, miss. She and Dad and all of 'em was goin' to a special service at their old Baptist chapel, and she tole me not to 'urry as they'd not be back nor no supper till nine. And she'll 'ave been far too 'cited over this 'ere murder to miss me." Zackery grinned. Like all his class he loved a revolting crime.

The grin faded as the Bishop's stern voice demanded: "If you've been locked in the church ever since the close of Evensong, how do you know that there has been a murder?"

Peggy gasped. How *brilliant* of Archie! He, too, felt distinct pleasure at his own acumen. But their joint satisfaction was cruelly dashed when Zackery, with an air of conscious virtue, replied that

"the choirmen was all talkin' about it. Someone fetched the vicar away, and he come back for the Bishop, and everybody in the vestry said as Mr. Archie Garnett wur murdered."

"That will do. You can go home, boy," rejoined the Bishop frigidly. He turned to Peggy. "Well, Miss Fenchurch, it's very good of you to have got the keys and come with me so late. I'm sorry to have troubled you for nothing."

"Not at all, my lord." Peggy smiled graciously. "We must have another hunt in the daytime."

The three left the church together. The Bishop and Peggy, after a cold farewell, stood watching Zackery Tann scamper out of sight. They were not anxious for him to linger and witness their return to the vicarage *via* the back-door. "I hope he won't say he saw us," muttered Peggy worriedly. "And—— Oh, dear! if he overheard what we were saying in the vestry—— I really must remember to call you Gilbert, and I do so hate the name."

Zackery Tann plunged recklessly down a maze and network of alleys that led to the docks. In the doorway of a low shop he found the individual of whom he was in pursuit and quest. "Good job you got out of the church with that there ring," he babbled. "The Bishop and Miss Peggy it was that we 'eard talkin'. Come to look for it, I guess, and the Bishop made me turn out me pockets. You bet I didn't tell 'im I see'd it drop off 'is finger when 'e was comin' down the pulpit steps after preachin', and when I tole you you made me pinch ole Potter's keys and come with you to look for it. Don't forget you promised me ten shillin's if we found it."

"You shall have ten shillings."

"And gimme the keys, please. I've got to put 'em back afore Potter misses 'em. Golly! wot a night it's been!"

CHAPTER VI

THE BISHOP REMOVED himself and his luggage to the Broadcaster Arms next day. This lessened the risk of detection—if risk there were—as the small hostelry which he remembered as old-fashioned and slow-going had changed hands since his departure from the town. It was now kept by an up-to-date, bustling couple who had never seen either himself or his cousin. Accompanying the episcopal suitcases, returned from Broadcaster Manor, was a hysterical note in Mrs. Garnett's sharp, pointed handwriting. Why was Gilbert so unkind? Why did he refuse to stay in her house? He positively must come and see her, especially before the inquest.

The substitute bishop set his jaw and sent the vicar in his stead.

Nothing, he declared, would induce him to touch the hand or eat the salt of a woman who had behaved so to her stepson and Peggy. The inquest on Archie Garnett had been fixed to take place at ten o'clock on Tuesday morning. Very reluctantly Hugh Singleton went to Broadcaster Manor the evening before.

Mrs. Garnett struck him as looking more haggard and feverish than she had done during their previous interview. A summons to appear at the inquest had unnerved her still further. Curtly he gave her the Bishop's message. He knew everything, and consequently declined to hold any communication with her. She turned on the vicar furiously.

"He knows—about Archie and Peggy? You told him, I suppose? Oh, and I thought you were a gentleman and would respect my confidence!"

"So I did." His cold tone rebuked her. "Gilbert—the Bishop—informed me that he had told Archie, when they met, of my marriage to Ethel, and from what Archie said the Bishop is in no doubt as to the part which you, Mrs. Garnett, played in the matter. I should advise you not to attempt to discuss it, or to try to soften him in any way."

Her face was rigid. "But he knew—he must have known—when he was coming to stay with me."

"Certainly. But he says himself that he would not have spared you." Hugh Singleton bit his lip, remembering the Bishop's forceful intention of, in his own phraseology, "giving Mrs. Garnett hell." "Archie's death has made it impossible for him to see you or to accept your hospitality. It has been a great shock to him, I can see, and Peggy——"

Here the vicar paused. Peggy was her usual controlled, capable self, and certainly did not act as though she were bereaved of her lover. He had hinted that she might wear mourning, but she had quietly refused. "I left off my ring, to keep people from asking awkward questions, so that a great many of them think that my engagement was broken off ages ago. I've no wish to pose as a disconsolate fiancée," she told her brother-in-law calmly. The Bishop had seconded and applauded her resolve.

"I can't see what they want with me at this horrible inquest." Mrs. Garnett spoke peevishly. "I'm sure I've nothing to tell them."

Hugh Singleton looked hard at her. Was she playing a part or speaking the truth? "I suppose they will have to trace Archie's movements as far as possible on the evening of his death," he said slowly.

"But why should they ask me? I never saw him." She shivered. The vicar's gaze did not leave her face. "Never?"

"Never!" She almost screamed the word at him. "Oh, what are you hinting at? What horrible meaning is there behind everything you say to me?" Her voice rose, common, grating, uncontrolled. "I swear to you that I never set eyes on him during that Sunday night. Oh! I know that I was fool enough to tell you that

I hoped he wouldn't come here, and it seemed too wonderful to be true when they told me he was dead, but I'd nothing to do with his murder—nothing!"

"Yet you were glad of it." Hugh Singleton spoke sternly.

"Of course—but it's very little good to me. He's given me away to Gilbert, and no doubt he's told Peggy, and she'll tell your wife, who's a perfect *sieve*, and soon everybody'll know." She began to cry. "And then you go and accuse me of murdering Archie!"

He disentangled the meaning of her involved sentences. His frown deepened. "When did you hear of the murder?" he asked.

"I won't be cross-examined." Her lips snapped together. "It was some time after I got in from church."

"And when was that?"

"Of course you won't believe me." Her face was as sullen as her tone. "But I can prove it." She rang the bell and by the time that her tall butler answered was lounging in her chair, outwardly calm and contemptuously uninterested. "Oh, Walters," she drawled, "the vicar and I are having a discussion as to how long it takes to walk from his church to this house. How long did you say, Mr. Singleton?" She turned to him graciously.

"Ten minutes to a quarter of an hour." His rejoinder came promptly.

Mrs. Garnett shook her head. "I couldn't do it in that. Walking down I might, but remember it's all up-hill coming." She frowned. "Of course I took it slowly last night, not feeling well, but—— What time was it I came in, Walters?" she inquired carelessly.

"It was just twenty-five minutes to eight, madam." The butler inclined a respectful head. "If you remember, you said to me when I opened the door that at the lodge you had heard the Town Hall clock striking the half-hour, and that our clocks must be slow as you had found yourself late for church."

Mrs. Garnett shot the discomfited vicar a look of triumph. "That allows five minutes from the lodge to this door." She drew her brows together. "I left the church about a quarter past seven, I know. Well, then, I took twenty minutes to get here. You must walk very fast if you do it in less."

After the door had closed upon Walters she sat upright in her chair. "Now do you believe me?" she hissed. "There are plenty of people to prove when I left St. Cleopas, and Walters can prove—he did—that he let me in twenty minutes later. Wade had my latch-key with her, so I rang. I—I hadn't time to murder Archie," she concluded hysterically.

"No, but you had the motive, and the means to bribe someone else to do it." The thought crossed the vicar's mind before doubt laid a cold, mistrustful hand upon it. On the fatal evening he had left Broadcaster Manor at ten minutes past six. The carriage had driven him to the church door in some seven minutes, returned for Mrs. Garnett, and at twenty-five minutes to seven he had seen her enter her pew to the opening verses of the first Psalm. She had said

that she left the church about a quarter past seven. He, and the entire congregation, had watched her unconcealed departure, and her butler had just announced that twenty minutes afterwards he admitted her into her own house. Surely his suspicions of her must be mere suspicions? Yet how opportune, how fortuitous the murder had been where she was concerned.

He rose, remarking coldly that he had a Girls' Guild. She strolled with him to the door, shooting him little looks—furtive, malicious, secretive—from under her eyelids. Suddenly she broke out with a totally irrelevant remark.

"By the way, such an annoying thing has happened. They do say that misfortunes never come singly, don't they? My dagger has disappeared."

"Your dagger?"

"Yes. A hideous thing that Gilbert sent me. You may have noticed it yesterday. It used to hang on the wall of the smoking-room, but on Sunday morning I brought it into my boudoir and left it on the table, meaning to ask Gilbert its history. There was a queer stone in the middle that I half thought of making into a pendant. Well, it's gone, vanished into thin air. The servants declare that they know nothing about it." She shrugged her shoulders.

"I remember seeing it. A nasty ornament for a lady's table." He spoke mechanically, for he knew now that his eyes had sought for the dagger directly he entered the room. When he saw no trace of it he tried to persuade himself that it had merely been restored to its usual place. *The weapon which had killed Archie Garnett with one single stab through the heart was missing and unidentified.* Was there any connection between Mrs. Garnett's lost property and the murder? He tried to dismiss the idea as impossible, fantastic, but it obtruded, insistent, unwelcome. . . .

"I haven't told the police about it." A look of contempt crossed Mrs. Garnett's face. "They're such thick-headed country bumpkins. I had Inspector James here this morning."

The vicar started. "You had? About——"

"Oh, this wretched affair, of course. He wanted to examine Archie's luggage. It came up with Gilbert's—only a couple of suitcases, with a few clothes and his toilet things. Doesn't look as though he were very sure of Peggy or intended to make a long stay, does it?"

She laughed, gently, maliciously. Her clergyman could have forgotten his cloth and hit her. "No papers, no clue, nothing," she sneered softly. "The police took everything. I was glad to get the lot out of the house."

They shook hands coldly at parting. "I should recommend you to advertise in our local paper for your dagger, if you don't care to consult the police," Hugh Singleton advised stiffly. "Not of any intrinsic value, I hope?"

"I've no idea. The stone looked just like a pebble. The thing had a sentimental value for me, or had, until Gilbert behaved so

heartlessly on this dreadful occasion." She followed her visitor out to the broad hall-door steps. "You may give him my love, and tell him that any time he likes to turn up to read the Riot Act or the Commination Service over me I shall be at home to him. What a good, magnanimous aunt-by-marriage I am! I won't say good-bye, only *au revoir*, as we shall meet at this tiresome inquest to-morrow."

The vicar walked away down the drive.

"God forgive me," he muttered, "but I'm certain you had a hand in it. I'd stake my next year's Easter offering that you know something, anyway."

The inquest on the body found under the archway was held the following morning at an obscure inn in a side street. Peggy and her lover had again talked matters over in every detail. Finally, with great reluctance, he yielded to her wish that he should continue the deception.

"I hate it, Peg," he mourned. "It means strings of lies, and it's none too safe, either. Gilbert hadn't been in Broadcaster for fifteen years, and I've been away for nine, so the likeness will pass muster here, but supposing that somebody turns up who knew him in Wurrumpoopa and says that I'm not Gilbert?"

"You must just stick to it that you are. Wurrumpoopa's too far off for casual encounters with people from there." Peggy was adamant. "What a mercy you've really been in Australia and can't make mistakes about the climate and the geography!"

"Yes, but, Peg, New Guinea isn't Australia, and I was never in Wurrumpoopa. I can't speak a word of the language—native dialects, I suppose. Sheep-farming, which was my job, is very different from holding services or preaching to cannibals."

"It will only be for a time. You can give out about that nervous breakdown as soon as you like (it's the most natural thing in the world after this affair), and—and"—Peggy's look was softened, exquisite—"in a few months we can be married."

Archie did not display the extravagant gratitude which she expected.

"That's another thing," he grumbled. "I can't marry you under a false name."

"Oh!" Peggy gasped helplessly.

"Well, don't you see, dearest? If I marry you as Gilbert Gifford, Bishop of Wurrumpoopa, it is under a false name, and how can I marry anyone as Archie Garnett if he's supposed to be dead? Do let's chuck it and own up."

Peggy was unwilling. They were not to be married yet in any case, she urged, whereupon Archie demanded indignantly how much longer she proposed that he should wait? Already they had wasted eight years, and the deception might continue indefinitely. Peggy shook her head.

"Don't you see that it's your danger I'm thinking of?" Her eyes were wet. "I—I'm afraid of Mrs. Garnett. She'd stick at nothing."

"Even if it were she who did for Gilbert, and thinks it's me, I don't feel any too safe." Archie nodded gloomily. "You remember that I told you Gilbert spoke of having enemies. There may be somebody in Wurrumpoopo who will follow him and do for me."

"Whoever murdered Gilbert murdered him because they thought they were murdering Archie Garnett." Peggy's tone was fierce. "You're safer as Gilbert, and Gilbert you must remain for the present."

Her lover looked hard at her. "I know that we're letting ourselves in for an awful lot of trouble, Peg."

Peggy's sternness, her resolve, amazed him. In the end he went to the inquest as the Bishop of Wurrumpoopo.

He was the first witness. With his heart thumping beneath the Bishop's pectoral cross he identified the dead man as his cousin, Archibald Garnett, only son of the late John Garnett of Broadcaster Manor. The jury, for the most part composed of stolid Broadcaster tradesmen and local farmers, settled down to listen to the see-saw of questions and answers between the Coroner and the witness. The former was a retired colonel who had only come to the neighbourhood a few years previously. Consequently he was a stranger to both the real and the impostor bishop. The Coroner fixed his glasses firmly on his well-shaped nose and opened fire.

"I understand, my lord, that you and this poor gentleman, whose death we are inquiring into, had only just returned from foreign parts?"

"Australia. My diocese—Wurrumpoopo—is in New Guinea, north of Kiwi," rejoined the witness glibly. He blessed the hours which Peggy had made him spend over an atlas the evening before.

"I see. Were you together in Wurrumpoopo?"

"Oh, no. We met by chance in Sydney." The Bishop coughed. "I was on the point of returning home, and he said—he suggested that he would come too."

"H'm. Can you give us any idea of Mr. Garnett's occupation?"

The Bishop was able to reply promptly. "Sheep-farming, somewhere in Australia. He had done remarkably well, I understood."

The Coroner's brow cleared. The question had been inspired by the wish to discover in tactful fashion whether the deceased were hard-up and had sponged on the Bishop (who looked a good-natured fool) for his passage.

"Exactly. And you left Australia together—when?"

"In August last. There was a shipping strike, which caused some delay. We met on August the eighth and tried to arrange about our passages, but owing to the strike we didn't sail till a fortnight later—August the twenty-second—in the *Kangaroo*."

"Thank you. Was Mr. Garnett in good spirits during the voyage?"

"Top-hole." The Bishop realized his error and blushed. "That is, I'm—I'm only quoting the poor fellow's own words. He said he'd had a top-hole time."

The Coroner wrote busily for some seconds. Fervently the Bishop

began to hope that he had sailed into smooth waters, but worse remained behind.

"And now, my lord, I understand that you arrived in the *Kangaroo* at Tilbury Docks on——"

"Saturday," supplied the Bishop.

"Saturday morning? Yes? Thank you. Now, were you and Mr. Garnett together from the time of your leaving the vessel until your arrival here?"

"We were."

"Where?"

The Bishop explained glibly. Shopping during the morning, a matinée, early dinner, finally to bed at the Palace Hotel, Frampton Street, Westminster. "We came down here by the 2.27 train from St. Pancras on the Sunday. I had promised to preach for my old friend Mr. Singleton at St. Cleopas."

"Can you tell us anything of Mr. Garnett's plans?"

The Bishop hesitated. "He said that he would come with me. He—he had not been home for several years, and he told me that there was somebody in Broadcaster whom he had to meet."

A little thrill of excitement ran through the room.

"Somebody whom he had to meet? A man or a woman?"

"He did not say."

The Coroner frowned. "Do you know whether he told anybody of his intention of accompanying you to Broadcaster?"

"Yes." A slight smile crossed the Bishop's face. "He sent a postcard to his stepmother, Mrs. Garnett, my uncle's widow, with whom I had intended to stay."

"Did you see the card?"

The Bishop, his smile broadening to a faintly malicious grin, thought of the card and the circumstances under which he had written it. In his rejoicings at the imminent prospect of shedding the episcopal rôle and garb he decided that there might be no harm in giving his detestable and detested stepmother a good fright. A warning of his arrival with Gilbert would let her understand that her treachery was exposed and the prodigal on her track. He had been extremely anxious to travel down to Broadcaster immediately, but how tiresomely Gilbert had delayed him. It was he who declared that there was no hurry (with Archie counting the moments until he saw Peggy), and who, finally, when at last they were safely in the train next day, implored, nay, insisted, that this preposterous deception should be carried on for a few hours longer.

"Yes, I saw it," he replied. "It was merely to inform Mrs. Garnett of the exact time of my arrival, and that he would be with me."

"Mrs. Garnett may have the card," reflected the Coroner. "If so, it had better be produced when we take her evidence." He looked up from his notes. "Now, what time did you arrive at Broadcaster, my lord?"

"About ten minutes past six. I had expected to get in at six, but the train was delayed."

"Quite so. And you and Mr. Garnett parted—where?"

"In the station. He went out by the side entrance, and I got a porter to take the luggage—his and mine—out to the carriage. Mrs. Garnett had sent to meet the train."

"Yes?"

"It was so late that I asked for the luggage to be taken to Broadcaster Manor and for myself to be dropped at the church. I was in the vestry by a quarter past six, and the vicar came in a few minutes afterwards. We—we went through the service, and then he was fetched away with this dreadful news about my cousin. We went together to identify the body."

"Your cousin was a Broadcaster man." The Coroner bit his pen-handle thoughtfully. "He would, no doubt, have an extensive acquaintance in the place?"

"Before he left he had. I don't know whether he kept up with anyone."

"But you can give us no idea as to the identity of the person whom he had expressed his intention of meeting?"

"Not the smallest. We really saw comparatively little of one another on the voyage, and he never discussed his private affairs." Archie hesitated. Gilbert had been remarkably reticent. Of what use to mention his talk of "enemies" which had led to this embarrassing exchange of rôles, and now, thanks to Peggy's alarms and importunities, to having a dead man's occupation and identity permanently fastened upon him? He foresaw a lifetime spent in gaiters, and his heart sank.

CHAPTER VII

NEXT DAY THE jury and the general public, gaping over the columns in the *Broadcaster Advertiser* devoted to the inquest on Archie Garnett, decided that the Bishop's evidence had been mostly disappointing. He was the chief witness, the star rôle, the *pièce de résistance*, yet he had revealed little or nothing. When he stepped down there was a vague sensation throughout the room of disappointment and frustration. If the Bishop of Wurrumpoopa, the last person who had parted with the dead man, could throw no light on the mystery, who could? It seemed such a purposeless, stupid crime, but carried out with skill and cunning.

The medical evidence followed. Dr. Thoroughgood, successor to Dr. Fenchurch, who two years previously had given up making an impression on Peggy's granite heart and married a widow with gilt-edged securities, delivered his professional opinion as to the cause of death. The deceased must have been sitting down, and from

behind had received a single blow with some sharp-pointed instrument which, penetrating the heart, instantly proved fatal.

The Coroner leaned forward. "You say, Dr. Thoroughgood, that the deceased was murdered *whilst sitting down*. Do you intend to infer that the crime was not committed on the spot where the body was found?"

"That is my opinion."

"Will you kindly put it plainly to the jury, sir? They are laymen, so we will dispense with technical terms as far as possible."

"Certainly." The doctor, a bony man, with a waist and an eyeglass, bowed. "The body, when I was called to examine it, was clad in a long coat, a travelling-coat, of light tweed. There had been rain earlier in the evening, and as that archway gets very little sun the paving underneath remains damp for a considerable period. I found the body lying on one side, with the legs slightly drawn up, and at once came to the conclusion that it had been placed there in that attitude. The coat was only muddied up the side and on the sleeve of the arm on which the deceased was resting. Had he been stabbed there, he must have fallen, either on his face, or sideways, which could not have avoided soiling the coat much more, and in other places."

Again the room felt that vibration of excitement.

"Then you conclude, Dr. Thoroughgood, that he was murdered elsewhere, and his body brought to where it was discovered—under the archway?"

"So I should say."

"He was stabbed through the heart?"

"Yes."

"Can you give us any idea as to the nature of the weapon? I understand that nothing has been found."

"Any long, sharp instrument might have produced the wound which killed the deceased. I could not say whether it was an ordinary knife, but I am inclined to think that it was something with a broader blade, for example, a Scotch dirk."

"Could the wound have been self-inflicted?"

"It is possible—but I consider it very unlikely."

"Suicide would not account for the disappearance of the weapon," murmured the Coroner. He looked hard at the witness. "Then, Dr. Thoroughgood, you consider that the deceased went into some house, and whilst engaged in conversation with someone to whose identity we have at present no clue, was stabbed through the heart?"

"That, I should judge, was what took place. From the position of the wound, I am of opinion that the deceased was possibly seated at a table when this unknown person leaned over him and stabbed him."

"Would death have been instantaneous?"

"Practically."

"And then the body was carried to the archway and left there? A difficult feat in broad daylight."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. "Nevertheless, I cannot account in any other conceivable way for the manner in which the fatal injury was inflicted, or for the state of the deceased's clothing."

"You said that he might have been sitting at a table. Was he possibly eating a meal?"

The doctor dissented. The deceased's last food had been taken several hours before his death. The Bishop was recalled, and corroborated this by a statement that he and his cousin had had tea together on the train about four o'clock.

"In your opinion, Dr. Thoroughgood, how long had Mr. Garnett been dead when his body was discovered?"

"About half an hour. Certainly not more."

"H'm." The Coroner consulted his notes. "The body was found by James Baynes, a railway signalman, about eight o'clock. This means that, according to your reckoning, doctor, the actual murder took place at 7.30 or thereabouts?"

"I should judge it to have done so."

"Thank you, sir. Now we had better hear what Baynes has to say."

James Baynes had very little to say and took about a quarter of an hour in saying it. His cottage was beside the railway-line which ran along the top of the archway, and he was in the habit of taking an unauthorized short cut from it to the street by slithering and jumping down the earth and shabby grass that ran up parallel with the arch to the fields through which the railway-line was cut. His last leap landed him almost on the body, which was by no means in the darkest shadow of the archway.

"Thank you, Baynes. And what did you do then?"

"Well, sir"—Baynes scratched his grizzled head—"I thought at first the gentleman wur just faint or drunk, he lay so natural-like. Then I see'd a p'liceman comin' up the street on the other side, so I went over and fetched 'im, and 'e said 'e wur dead."

"Could you identify him?"

"Never set eyes on 'im afore, sir, but the bobby looked in 'is pockets and found a leather thing with cards, and 'Mr. A. Garnett' on 'em, and there was an envelope with a hotel bill, bed and breakfast for the Bishop of somew'ere—sounded furrin—and Mr. Garnett, in Lunnun the day afore, and p'liceman 'e says, 'W'y, that's the bishop my missus was talkin' about. Preachin' at St. Cleopas 'e is, this very evenin'. Off you go, my lad, and get the vicar 'ere, and the Bishop too.' So I does," concluded Mr. Baynes modestly.

The brief evidence of the policeman, followed by that of Hugh Singleton, corroborated this. The latter described how he had gone with the Bishop to identify the body. Witness had known the deceased intimately and found no difficulty in recognizing him. He was a trifle stouter and very sun-burned, but the vicar would have known him anywhere. He had only learned that afternoon from Mrs. Garnett that she expected her stepson as well as the Bishop. The deceased had not called at the vicarage. The vicar's sister-in-

law, Miss Fenchurch, had been there all the evening and had seen nothing of him.

This last statement aroused no comment, nor was Peggy called. Her engagement to Archie Garnett had become such ancient history that few people remembered the fact of its existence. As the vicar was in church at the time the dead man would hardly have visited the house to see his old friend. The problem of where he had gone grew darker than ever.

Mrs. Garnett was next called. The Coroner looked extremely hard at her. He had lived in Broadcaster long enough to hear plenty of the stories about her, and he knew perfectly well that she had been on bad terms with her stepson. Did she at all regret his untimely end? She stood very erect, a little scornful smile parting her mouth at the craning necks and bolting eyes which her appearance occasioned. Her voice was low, but audible in every corner of the room.

"The deceased Mr. Garnett was your stepson, madam," the Coroner began. "You had not seen him for some years, I understand."

"No. He went abroad—to Australia—shortly after his father's death." She took the wind out of the Coroner's sails by adding in a bored drawl: "He was disappointed by the provisions of my husband's will. I had a great deal to bear with in consequence."

The Coroner contemplated her through his glasses. "Had you been in communication with your stepson whilst he was abroad?"

"Only at first. I used occasionally to send him a local paper if there was anything in it to interest him." Across the room her eyes met the vicar's in deliberate devilry. "I'm a wretched correspondent. The Bishop—my late husband's nephew—and I exchanged letters at intervals, but I had no idea that he and my stepson had met in Australia."

She seemed aloof, uninterested. The Coroner resumed:

"Well, Mrs. Garnett, I understand that you expected the Bishop, who was coming to preach for Mr. Singleton. The Bishop says that your stepson sent you a postcard, telling you to expect him also."

She nodded. "Yes."

"We had better see that card, I think." The jury, interrogated by the raising of a pair of thin eyebrows, concurred with the Coroner's opinion.

"I'm sorry." Mrs. Garnett yawned very slightly. "I'm afraid I didn't keep it."

"That is unfortunate." The Coroner's glance raked her. "Can you remember what was written on it?"

Mrs. Garnett, reflecting that she had shown it to the vicar, and that the entire staff of Broadcaster Manor, to say nothing of the post-office, could bear witness if she lied, saw no use in doing so.

"Just a line, telling me that the Bishop expected to arrive at my house at 6.15"—she yawned again—"and that his cousin would accompany him." She frowned a little. "Then there was a verse of Scripture, the text which the Bishop preached from in the evening. I couldn't make it out, so I showed it to Mr. Singleton, who happened

to be calling, and he thought it very irreverent." She shrugged her shoulders. "I can only conclude that Archie jotted it down before he wrote the first part of the card, and that it was a memorandum of something to do with the Bishop's sermon."

"I am sorry that you did not keep that card, Mrs. Garnett."

"Why should I? It was not of any value or importance."

Her calm insolence nonplussed her interrogator. He continued after a pause:

"Then in consequence of this card you expected your stepson?"

"Well, I supposed that he would turn up some time. Archie was always utterly casual." She smiled disagreeably. "I expected the Bishop to dinner. His train got in so late that he went straight to the church instead of coming to my house, and his luggage and my stepson's were brought up together. I was quite in the dark as to when Archie would condescend to appear, so I went to church, and soon after I got back the—the news of the murder came."

For the first time her hard composure showed signs of failing her. The Coroner went on:

"How did you go to church? Did you walk or drive?"

"The carriage took Mr. Singleton there and returned for me. I drove down with my maid, Wade, but I felt unwell and had to leave the church at the beginning of the sermon."

"A moment. What time was that?"

"About a quarter past seven. I walked straight home, and my butler let me in at twenty-five minutes to eight."

"And you saw nothing of your stepson?"

"No."

"But why did you not stay in the house, if you expected him?"

"Because I wished to hear my nephew preach, for one thing, and"—her eyes snapped—"I had no intention of awaiting Archie's pleasure or convenience. I had seen and heard nothing of him for years, and the first time that he chose to stroll in I was certainly not going to be found waiting for him. I considered his card most unnecessary and impertinent."

"Then he did not come to the house?"

"I presume not. As I have just told you, I was at church, and the servants would certainly have said if he had called during my absence."

Clearly there was nothing more to be got out of her. She removed her tall stateliness, composed as ever, and a few unimportant witnesses took her place in their turn. The porter who had been summoned by the Bishop to collect the luggage had seen him parting from a gentleman in a long, light overcoat, who went out by the side entrance of the station. The proprietor of a small sweet-shop and newsagent's just outside the station remembered a stranger coming in for a Sunday paper about a quarter past six. His vague description of the purchaser tallied with Archie Garnett. The customer had seemed in a hurry and took the first paper that was offered to him. Here the clue stopped. From the time when he parted from the Bishop in the

station to the moment that his dead body was discovered under the archway no human eye had apparently seen Archie Garnett, no soul held converse with him. Yet the evidence, medical and otherwise, proved that he must have been in some house, whither he had probably gone by appointment, and in all likelihood had there met his death.

One of the most puzzling features about the crime was the absence of apparent motive. It was not robbery, as the dead man's pockets were unrifled. He wore an expensive wrist-watch, and in the leather case containing the cards with his name was a wad of Treasury notes. These things were untouched, and considering that Broadcaster swarmed with bad characters infesting the neighbourhood of its docks one of such might reasonably have been suspected of murdering a stranger for the valuables he carried, but not out of wanton malice or purposeless stupidity. The theory of robbery had to be reluctantly dismissed.

Ultimately the Coroner adjourned the inquest for a fortnight, adding an appeal that in the interval anybody who had seen or spoken to the murdered man between six-fifteen and seven-thirty would come forward.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BISHOP WENT for a walk that same evening and, by a curious coincidence, fell in with Peggy Fenchurch, returning from a distant farm where she had been to look up a Sunday school absentee.

They strolled slowly through fields despoiled of their harvest and talked in low voices. Conversation was easier, less artificial, not so liable to be overheard and misinterpreted as between four walls. The dead man's funeral had been arranged to take place on the following afternoon. The Bishop had seriously offended (a) Mrs. Garnett, by refusing to see her in order to discuss the procedure, and (b) Hugh Singleton, by declining to take any part in the ceremony itself.

"That's absurd," declared Peggy warmly. "You said in your sermon—Gilbert's sermon—that in lonely places where there wasn't a clergyman ordinary people had to bury each other. There's nothing illegal in it."

"Well, I can't and won't. Gilbert would haunt me, I verily believe."

"On the contrary, he ought to be very much obliged to you. It's entirely his fault that you're in this extraordinary, appalling position."

"You may well call it that." The supposed Gilbert groaned. "I've spent the whole afternoon dodging reporters."

Peggy nodded in sympathy. "Don't tell them anything. You never know what you mightn't let slip." She slid her arm through his. "Poor old boy! Was it very bad at that ghastly inquest?"

"Awful." He set his teeth. "You know, Peg, I feel that we're doing very wrong. By keeping up this deception we may be aiding and abetting Gilbert's murderer, whoever he is."

Peggy shook her head. Her lips shaped the words "Mrs. Garnett." Archie felt a spasm of anger.

"Peggy, you heard her evidence. She left the church at a quarter past seven, and she was in her own house twenty minutes later. According to that doctor-fellow Gilbert was murdered at half-past seven roughly. Mrs. Garnett simply wouldn't have had time."

"All the same it was very much to her advantage to get you out of the way," Peggy persisted. She halted, thinking.

"Not it. She knows that you and I and Hugh know what she did—I mean the use she made of Ethel's marriage—and she doesn't care a hoot for Broadcaster's opinion."

Peggy asked slowly: "Why did she dislike you so much, Archie?"

He shook his head. "Very few women are keen on a stepson, and I suppose I let her see too plainly that I resented her taking my mother's place." He paused and went on: "Then, when my father's will was read, leaving every penny, except a few minor legacies, to her, well, naturally I blamed her, and took myself off before she had the pleasure of turning me out."

Peggy pondered over this for some seconds. "The will was made just before Mr. Garnett died, wasn't it?"

"Exactly a week. I was away, staying with the Martins at Ashcroft." His face softened. "The pater didn't want me to go, but he gave in in the end. I never saw the old chap alive again."

"And yet he left Mrs. Garnett everything, although you were his only son—his only child?"

Archie laughed roughly. "Come, Peg, you're surely not hinting that my stepmother forged his will and then put him out of the way? Old Garth drew it up, and Dad died of apoplexy just after dining at The Gables. She wasn't there at all."

"Of course I didn't mean that." Peggy's tone was half-absent, her pretty brows knit. "Only—— Archie, did it never strike you as odd the way *Gilbert* was left out as well as you? Mr. Garnett was awfully fond of him, looked on him as another son, and even if he had his profession and some Gifford money it was queer not to mention his name. There were other legacies," she reminded her lover. "Old employees, and servants, and even Hugh got a hundred pounds. It seems funny to exclude both you and Gilbert—his son and his nephew—so pointedly."

"Well, Gilbert used to write regularly to the Pater up to the very end. I remember my stepmother saying that there was a letter from Wurrumpoopa the morning of the day he died, so they can't have quarrelled. And Mrs. Garnett was always fond of Gilbert. She'd

have been quite pleased for him to get a legacy, however much she influenced my father to exclude me."

"Did Gilbert say anything to you about it?"

"You mean when we met in Sydney? Oh, he let out that at the time he thought the will so unjust to me that he wrote to my step-mother and remonstrated, telling her that she ought to divide the principal with me." Archie laughed shortly. "She wrote back that her husband had excellent reasons for making his will in such terms, and in any case I was otherwise provided for."

"What could she have told him about you?" Peggy sighed. "Was she left it all unconditionally, Archie?"

"Rather! Not tied up in any way, and she can will it as she pleases. I'm only surprised that she hasn't married again."

This talk of wills and legacies brought the minds of both conspirators round to a very practical difficulty. If Archie Garnett were dead, and by the following day buried, his money would go to whomsoever he had bequeathed it, and the Bishop of Wurrumpoopaa would continue to enjoy the income from his see. Archie and Peggy groaned as this unpalatable fact presented itself to them.

"Have you made a will?" Peggy demanded. She laughed a little. "Because if you haven't, and I'm sure I hope not, Gilbert, who's you, ought to get everything as your next-of-kin. Or is a stepmother next-of-kin, Archie?"

"Don't know. Oughtn't to be, anyway." He smiled down at her. "As a matter of fact I made my will before I left Broadcaster."

"Oh, Archie! Who's the fiend you've left your money to? You can't have bought an annuity. You're too young."

"I've left it to you." He spoke gruffly, almost as though ashamed of his action.

"Archie!" Her quick brain grasped detail and significance. "You left it to me—before you went to Australia?" He nodded. "Then when—when you heard that I was married to Hugh you didn't alter the will? Oh!"

Archie reddened furiously. "Hang it, Peg, why should I behave like a cad simply because you preferred a chap who's fifty per cent a better man than I ever set up to be? I—I thought the cash would be useful to you as Hugh had only his living, and frankly I didn't mean you to get it for a good many years."

They both laughed.

"Well, I suppose I shall get it now." Peggy's tone was rueful. "Can I make it over to you privately, Archie, or what?"

"I imagine that you'll have to lend me some of it. Luckily I have some loose money with me—about fifty pounds—but that won't go very far. And I've not the foggiest idea where Gilbert banked, or whether they pay a bishop's screw when he's out of the diocese, or where I stand, in short. It's awful."

Peggy stood revolving the mounting difficulties. "Is there much, Archie?" she asked shyly.

"A good deal." He shrugged his shoulders. "You see, Peg, I

made a pile out of sheep when I went abroad. I was always keen on an out-door life and wanted to go in for it here, but the Pater said it was to be the works or nothing. I don't know whether my bank-balance would have altered Mrs. Garnett's reception of the prodigal, but there wasn't room to mention that little fact on the card." He grinned.

"She'll know when the will's read."

"Yes. I hope that I shall be there to see her face."

"I think"—Peggy's voice was slightly severe—"that you'd better go up to London to see a doctor and come back with that nervous breakdown. I shan't feel safe about you until you do."

They walked home together through the better part of Broadcaster. In many a house of Hugh Singleton's parish a satisfied matron, resting in her front parlour after Monday's strenuous washing and Tuesday's day-long ironing, looked after them with interest and sympathy. Dr. Fenchurch's unmarried daughter was extremely popular, much more so than the vicar's wife. A wish, hearty, feminine, frankly expressed, rose in several parish ladies' ample bosoms on beholding the couple, namely, that "Miss Peggy might get the Bishop."

The same idea, more chastely wrapped-up and elegantly phrased, was penetrating the rather limited intelligence of Miss Peggy's sister, Mrs. Singleton. She had seen the Bishop parting from Peggy on the doorstep.

"Hugh"—Ethel began by cautiously fencing with the subject later in the evening—"do you think that Peggy was really so fond of poor Archie?"

Her husband looked worried.

"Well, honestly, Ethel, I don't quite know what to think. We all took it for granted that she was. And now, when he comes home and things might reasonably be expected to be straightened out, there's this dreadful business. Archie is murdered, and Peggy actually doesn't seem to mind. She's going about just as usual."

His wife corrected him darkly. "Not just as usual, Hugh."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"*With the Bishop*," intoned Mrs. Singleton.

"*With Gilbert*?"

"Yes. With Gilbert. It's—rather evident." She looked significantly at her spouse. "He was here on Sunday night. Next morning he and Peggy went together to the Broadcaster Arms to see about his room, and in the afternoon they took a walk."

"There's no harm in that—in either of those things. Gilbert's an old friend. I expect she wanted to talk to him about Archie." The vicar was pacing up and down the floor. "You must remember, Ethel, that his return with Gilbert was totally unexpected. She thought that he was in Australia, and the next she hears of him is that he's home and has been murdered."

Mrs. Singleton was still pouting and unconvinced.

"Well then, to-day—— The inquest—— Directly Gilbert had

given his evidence he rushed off and Ruby says he came straight here. I thought it was very pointed and rather impolite the way he left you and me to walk home together. And this afternoon in Market Street Lady Taffendale had got hold of him, and he said suddenly: 'Oh, I beg your pardon, I have to speak to Miss Fenchurch,' and dashed after her just as we were coming out of the fishmonger's."

"What did he want?"

"I don't know. He evidently didn't see me at first—I had stopped to ask about cod for Friday's dinner—and he was just beginning: 'Oh, Peggy, I simply must tell you——' when she interrupted him with: 'You haven't said how-do-you-do to Ethel,' and he got perfectly scarlet. They certainly met this evening, probably by arrangement, because I saw them come to the door together, and he was ages saying good-bye."

Hugh Singleton smoked in silence. "I never thought Peggy heartless," he muttered.

"No, but with poor Archie not even buried——" Ethel shivered. "Still, she hadn't seen him or heard from him for years, and she was very young when they got engaged." She paused. "Hugh, don't you think that she would make a splendid bishop's wife?"

Her husband turned to stare at her. "Ethel! Is that what you're hinting? Peggy and Gilbert! Why, he's a confirmed bachelor, and always so strong on the celibacy of the clergy. You remember how cool he was over our engagement?"

"I do indeed. He wrote you an odious letter." Ethel's lips thinned. "And I suppose if they do decide to make a match of it all the old cats in Broadcaster, from Mrs. Garnett downwards, will say that Peggy put Archie out of the way. She could have, you know, Hugh. She was alone here from half-past six till I came in at eight, and the archway is only about five minutes' walk away."

He gave a quick shudder. "Ethel, don't, even in joke. Your own sister!"

"I know. But it's possible, as far as time and opportunity go, and people are such beasts. I was thankful she wasn't called this morning to give evidence, or any questions asked that might drag her into it. Isn't it too bad to be mixed up with a murder, Hugh, respectable people like ourselves?"

Mrs. Singleton's macabre speculations as to the possibility of Peggy's having been the hand which had cut short Archie Garnett's career received a fresh impetus next day. Her motive, had she lacked one, was laid bare directly the will was read. Peggy Fenchurch walked into the vicarage dining-room the unacknowledged fiancée of the dead man. She emerged an heiress on a large scale. All along she had known that the money which the first Mrs. Garnett left to her son was a considerable amount, but Archie's subsequent dealings in sheep had succeeded beyond the dreams of avarice. Immensely wealthy, his will, dated the week that he had shaken off the dust of Broadcaster, and since then neither revoked nor amended, left every-

thing to Elisabeth Maud Fenchurch. Ethel, darting curious glances at her, noted that she did not look surprised. Of course Archie might have told her before he sailed, but was she aware of the staggering total of his bequest?

The funeral had been small and private. By an ingenious stratagem the general public, collecting in ghoulish groups, was led to understand that it would take place from St. Cleopas in the afternoon. Instead, a brief service was conducted by Hugh Singleton at the mortuary chapel. The plain coffin was then removed unobtrusively and conveyed by motor-hearse to be laid beside the first Mrs. Garnett. She had expressed a wish that she might be buried with her own people at the other side of the county. It seemed the most natural thing to bury her son there also, and the said son salved his conscience by reminding himself that his mother had always been fond of Gilbert.

The mourners—Hugh Singleton, Peggy, the Bishop, and Mr. Garth, the Garnetts' old family lawyer—returned to the vicarage about five o'clock. Here an unpleasant surprise awaited them in the person of Mrs. Garnett, seated determinedly on the drawing-room sofa. After learning that Peggy had been informed by the Bishop of Mrs. Garnett's treachery to herself and Archie the vicar had decided that his wife had better be apprised of it also. Ethel, cordially applauding the Bishop's loyal behaviour in totally ignoring his aunt-by-marriage, was righteously indignant on her sister's behalf. A slight personal grievance fanned the flame. How annoying that for eight years Archie had regarded her as a spinster, and imagined Peggy in her place as Hugh's wife!

"That wretch, Mrs. Garnett! I'll never forgive her, Peggy. You poor darling, she's spoilt your whole life. I utterly refuse to speak to her again."

Her decision was rapidly put to the proof. The funeral had not started from Broadcaster more than half-an-hour when there was a loud peal at the vicarage bell. Ruby, who had no instructions otherwise, left the caller standing on the mat and went to inform her mistress. Mrs. Garnett took advantage of the open door to walk in.

"Ethel!" She swept forward to the dismayed Mrs. Singleton, prone on the sofa with some chocolates (how nice of Gilbert to remember her favourite kind and to bring her such a huge box from London) as an accompaniment to finishing the latest Aubrey Pouncebox. Hugh was so narrow and disapproving that she always had to read the divine Aubrey when he was out. Such a chance as this had seemed too good to be missed as he could not be back for another two hours. And now to have Mrs. Garnett marching in!

She scrambled to her feet, trying to remember that she was Mrs. Singleton, the vicar's wife, a married woman, and not the spinster daughter of a provincial doctor whom, as such, the mistress of Broadcaster Manor had alternately patronised and snubbed. As Hugh's richest parishioner Ethel had been forced to endure a good

deal from her since her marriage, when all the time—— Ethel's heart swelled.

"I have come to know the meaning of this unpardonable insult." Mrs. Garnett fired the first shot. "Why was I not informed of the hour and place of my unfortunate stepson's funeral? I drove down just now and saw a crowd outside the church door——"

"Very likely." Ethel smiled sweetly. "They'll have some time to wait."

Mrs. Garnett stamped her foot. "When is the funeral?"

Ethel smirked. "It's going on now."

"Where? In the church?"

"No. There was a service at the mortuary chapel, but the funeral itself is at Marsghyll."

Mrs. Garnett's nostrils dilated. "Why at Marsghyll?"

"Well"—Ethel bit her lip—"Archie's mother is buried there. It was most natural——" She did not finish, but sought for her handkerchief. Aubrey Pouncebox and the episcopal chocolates had not employed her entire attention that afternoon. Most of the time her thoughts had strayed to her old playfellow who, had it not been for this meddling, wicked woman, would have become her brother-in-law.

Anger forced her into speech. "I wonder that you dare to show your face here!" she cried. "You have spoilt my sister's life, and Archie's, and now he is murdered, and you have the assurance to come to his funeral!"

"Thanks to my nephew the Bishop's extraordinary want of nice feeling in keeping me in the dark as to the time and place, and you and your husband aiding and abetting him"—a sneer parted Mrs. Garnett's thin mouth—"I seem unlikely to be able to be present at the interment, but"—she grew tigerish—"I shall certainly stay and hear the will read."

"By all means." Ethel saw the look on the other woman's face and realized that this speech was a clever "feeler" to discover if there were any will. "Mr. Garth (he's much more a friend than a lawyer, isn't he?) was to bring it with him after the funeral. Do stay. Only I'm afraid I can't sit and entertain you. I have to take the children a'walk as Peggy isn't here. Ruby will bring you some tea if you care, and that book is most interesting." She indicated Aubrey Pouncebox and smiled herself out of the room.

Thus it came about that the small party of mourners found this most unwelcome addition to their number. They were tired and cold and sad, grieving at the loss of an old friend, stunned by the strangeness and mystery of his end. Mr. Garth had never liked Mrs. Garnett and had remonstrated as strongly as he dared at the will which her husband compelled him to draw up, leaving her everything. Ethel, her temporary courage evaporated, saw St. Cleopas ruined and herself and Hugh begging their bread owing to the removal of Mrs. Garnett's patronage and subscriptions. The Bishop was mortally afraid that she would recognize and denounce

him, whilst Peggy, illogically convinced that Mrs. Garnett, in addition to spoiling Archie's life and hers, had murdered Gilbert under the misconception that he was Archie, naturally felt disinclined to welcome her. It was not a pleasant gathering.

Archie's anticipation of a sight of Mrs. Garnett's face when she heard the provisions of her stepson's will was disagreeably fulfilled. Peggy shivered as her look met the other woman's. Such naked hate, such unabashed malice, such baffled greed. Involuntarily her glance sought her lover's. He had been prudently sitting in a dark corner, but instinctively he moved his chair nearer to her as though to protect her.

"And this preposterous will leaves everything to Peggy Fenchurch!" Mrs. Garnett gasped. "How much, Mr. Garth?"

"I am not yet fully acquainted with the details of the late Mr. Archibald Garnett's Australian fortune, madam"—the lawyer spoke stiffly—"but I understand it to be an immense one. His real and personal estate in this country amounts approximately to——" He named a substantial figure.

Mrs. Garnett sucked in her lower lip. "And not a penny to anyone else?" she demanded.

"Miss Fenchurch is the sole legatee, Mrs. Garnett."

Mrs. Garnett rose abruptly. "Well, I wish her joy of it. Blood money!" she almost snarled.

When she had gone the remaining members of the group turned to one another with blank faces. Hugh and Ethel congratulated and kissed Peggy. The Bishop looked as though he would like to participate in the latter ceremony. Peggy, feeling a hypocrite of the deepest dye, accepted their kindness as well as she could. Mr. Garth, having somewhat clumsily expressed the conviction that a large fortune was better worth possessing than a lover in Australia who never wrote and at length came home to get himself promptly murdered, uttered a blood-curdling suggestion.

"My dear Miss Fenchurch, don't you think that a very graceful testimony of your—er—affection for the deceased, and—and gratitude and all that, would be for you to offer a substantial reward for the discovery of his murderer—say a thousand pounds?"

CHAPTER IX

NEXT DAY THE Bishop went up to town, alleging an appointment with Sir Hector HopScotch, the eminent psycho-analyst. By the time that the journey was over he felt himself on the verge of the nervous breakdown which was the ostensible cause of his consulting Sir Hector about his health.

At Broadcaster station he succeeded in dodging Admiral Poop, whom he remembered of old as the proprietor of an irascible temper and pronounced views upon Apostolic Succession. These he enjoyed airing at all times and in all places. A long railway journey with the admiral, who would regard a bishop as his lawful and heaven-sent prey, was not to be contemplated for an instant. The Bishop darted into an empty compartment. Appearances were deceitful, for two minutes after the train had started on a non-stop run of an hour and a half an enterprising journalist crawled out from under the seat. He had made three separate attempts to interview the Bishop, unsuccessful until now. The interview was brief. Within five seconds the discomfited wielder of a fountain-pen thankfully took refuge in a smoking-carriage, as far from the Bishop as the length of the train permitted. He mopped his damp brow. "Only that the Bishop was preaching at the time, and had an unshaken alibi, I'd really be inclined to think him capable of murdering his cousin. He certainly looked as though he wanted to murder me," the reporter reflected uneasily.

The Bishop enjoyed peace as far as Thorpe. This, the first stop, owned the distinction of being a cathedral city. Three clergymen irrupted into the Bishop's compartment. They occupied the three vacant corner seats and furtively scrutinized the person in the fourth. Prebendary Pinfold, Archdeacon Pyke, and a very minor canon suddenly felt light dawn upon them. Of course!

Prebendary Pinfold leaned forward. "Why, I believe—I do believe it's the Bishop of Wurrumpoopo." He seized and shook the Bishop's limp hand. "We met last—dear me! let me see—in Melbourne."

The Bishop agreed without enthusiasm that they had done so. His heart sank. Surely Wurrumpoopo was far enough off to have prevented these accursedly awkward encounters and re-unions? He began to wish fervently that his diocese had been situated anywhere else, Siberia, or Central China——

"And how's Mason?" chirped the prebendary. The Bishop looked blank. "You remember Mason? He was my curate at St. Bride's, Melbourne. A charming fellow; keen as mustard on missions. He joined you when you were Archdeacon of Papua."

"Oh, yes, yes." The Bishop snatched feverishly at the clue. "As a matter of fact, missions were—were too much for him. He was eaten by a shark, or was it cannibals? I'm really not sure, but it was one or the other."

"Poor dear fellow!" ejaculated the shocked prebendary. He indicated his travelling-companions. "May I introduce Archdeacon Pyke and Mr. Mace, my lord?"

The Bishop bowed and conversation became general. To his relief the topic of the murder was not even touched upon. His three acquaintances were much more interested in speculating whether the ritualistic goings-on at St. Michael and All Angels would result in the rector's compulsory resignation, and if so, who would be his successor. The vasty deep of clerical events and gossip almost

submerged the Bishop more than once. Names were mentioned that conveyed nothing to him. Questions which he found it exceedingly difficult to answer or parry were put to him. His opinion was solicited on matters of which he knew nothing. Requests impossible to refuse showered down upon him. His relief was immense when the train stopped at Windy Heath and his three tormentors got out. They were on their way to a conference where Prebendary Pinfold was reading a paper on Birth-Control.

"Whew!" moaned the Bishop. "This is awful." He sank back in his seat, gloomily conscious that he was pledged to speak on Foreign Missions at the forthcoming Church Congress, to address the annual diocesan gathering of Sunday-school teachers in Thorpe Cathedral, and to find out for the satisfaction of Mr. Mace, an enthusiastic amateur architect, the exact proportions of the one at Wurrumpoopo. The Bishop had not known that Wurrumpoopo possessed a cathedral until called upon to give the length, depth, breadth, and height thereof.

He unbuttoned his gaiters, which were somewhat tight, put up his feet, and fell sound asleep. An hour from London he woke, to find a small, brisk, bearded man seated opposite. The Bishop blushed brick-red and plunged for the offending gaiters. The new-comer smiled.

"You won't remember me, Bishop." The Bishop certainly did not. "I was one of the jury at the inquest on Tuesday."

"Oh!" ejaculated the Bishop blankly.

Captain Campkin was a fortunate individual, for he had just realized a life's ambition. Throughout the better part of his sixty years he had nursed a secret hankering after crime. Not, be it understood, as a personal participator in such, but merely as onlooker and investigator. He read innumerable detective novels, and was a diligent student of newspaper reports of murders. He could hardly realize his own good luck during the past few days. To be living in a place in which a real, genuine, sensational murder was committed had seemed enthralling enough, but to be one of the jury at the inquest, to view the dead body, hear the evidence, and, in short, play a personal part in the sordid drama, exceeded his wildest dreams. He was a retired sea-captain who lived in a cottage between Broadcaster and Broadcaster Manor. Having nothing to do, beyond a little mild gardening, he devoted himself chiefly to the study of other people's affairs.

"A very strange and sad business." He looked considerably out of the window whilst the Bishop struggled with the buttons on his gaiters. "Do you suppose the truth will ever be discovered?"

The Bishop shrugged his shoulders. "Impossible to say. Doesn't look like it at present."

"Of course there are plenty of unsolved crimes." Captain Campkin warmed to his favourite theme. "For instance, the train murder of 1907."

"Afraid I don't remember it."

"I suppose you were out of England. It was a young girl travelling back to school. Ladies Only compartment, door locked; but in spite of that she was found with her throat cut. Shocking affair! No one ever traced."

"Abominable!"

"Then there was that old lady in the Pump Room at Chelmschester. Discovered with her head battered in. No clue. Nobody knew who'd done it, or why. And there was another case a year or two ago, two elderly sisters living together. The younger one died suddenly, arsenical poisoning." Captain Campkin added darkly: "I always suspected the sister, but there wasn't enough evidence for an arrest."

"I shouldn't think women would make good criminals." The Bishop spoke lazily.

"Why not? Twice as cunning and unscrupulous as men. That reminds me"—he leaned forward—"I wish you'd give me your advice, Bishop."

"What about?"

"Well, whether I ought to bring a little fact to the Coroner's notice before the resumed inquest on your cousin. I didn't realize it sooner, but it may have some bearing on the case."

The Bishop sat up. "What is it?"

"You remember Mrs. Garnett's evidence? She didn't quite tell the truth."

The Bishop's eyes narrowed. "You mean she concealed something—something of importance?"

"I don't know whether it's important enough to make a fuss about. It may have nothing to do with the murder." Captain Campkin paused. "You recollect that Mrs. Garnett said, in reply to the Coroner's question, that she left the church at a quarter past seven and came straight home. Well, she didn't."

All Peggy's suspicions ranged themselves in full force against the Bishop's shocked incredulity. "She didn't?"

"No. I'd better explain where I live, to begin with." The speaker produced pencil and paper and drew a rough sketch with the aid of a railway-guide as a table. "Here's Broadcaster Manor. That's the road to it from the town. Mind! it's all up-hill, and a steep pull on a warm evening. I don't say that Mrs. Garnett couldn't have walked it in twenty minutes, but as I'll prove to you presently she didn't come that way, though she gave the impression that she did."

The Bishop sat very still, staring at the diagram.

"Here's my house." Captain Campkin marked a dot about a quarter of a mile to the right of Broadcaster Manor. "On the moor. There's a sheep-track past it that you can get to by going through the town and under the railway-arch where your cousin's body was found." He halted impressively. "An active person could leave St. Cleopas at a quarter past seven, and by taking this short cut reach Broadcaster Manor in ten minutes instead of twenty. Mrs.

Garnett must have done that, because I was smoking in my garden that evening, and at half-past seven I saw her coming from the town and crossing the moor in the direction of her own house."

The Bishop sat rigid. "Did—did she seem agitated, or as though anything unusual had happened?"

"She was smiling."

"Smiling?"

"Yes. Bishop,"—he laid his hand on the other's black-clad knee—"as a church dignitary you'll be familiar with the story of the man whom the seven wicked spirits entered into. I never believed that parable till I saw Mrs. Garnett's face on the Sunday night. She looked like a woman possessed of seven devils."

He sat back, contemplating the Bishop. Both had grown pale.

"Then you think——?" the Bishop hinted.

"I don't *know* anything. I've only suspicions. But why did she deliberately give the Coroner and jury the impression that she walked home by Acacia Road? She said, too, that it took her twenty minutes. By my reckoning, and at the pace she walked, ten would be nearer the truth. That leaves ten minutes unaccounted for. The murder was committed about half-past seven. She must have passed the archway at the time the body was there."

The Bishop bit his lip.

"As to motive"—Captain Campkin mused—"Broadcaster's a gossip hole, but I always understood that Mrs. Garnett rather diddled her stepson out of a lot of money, and there was no love lost between them. She practically admitted that at the inquest. As a relation you'll know the facts better than I."

"It was—something like that."

"I thought so. And now it's all over the place that he made a fortune in Australia and left every penny to that pretty Miss Fenchurch. Were they engaged?"

"Yes." Suddenly Archie realized the light in which Broadcaster would regard him, if, as Bishop of Wurrumpoopa, he eventually married Peggy. A fortune-hunter, enjoying his dead cousin's shoes and fiancée. Damn! And now this fresh evidence to support Peggy's suspicions of Mrs. Garnett. When she heard it she would only implore him to go on with the deception for his own safety.

"Shall I say anything?" Captain Campkin asked.

"I think not—for the present. I admit that it looks very queer, but we have no proof that Mrs. Garnett had anything to do with the murder. Better to let things develop." The Bishop smiled grimly.

"Wait and see, in short?"

"Exactly. Ah, here we are." The train was slowing down.

Captain Campkin buttonholed the Bishop determinedly as the carriage door swung open. "You've no suspicions yourself? In your evidence you said that your cousin told you he was meeting somebody. *Who?*"

"I have not the faintest idea. From what you've told me"—their eyes met—"it may have been Mrs. Garnett."

"And she murdered him." The unspoken conclusion harboured itself in both men's minds as they parted.

The Bishop put in a busy afternoon. The visit to the psychoanalyst had been a mere excuse, for he did not go near one; but realizing that a bishop suffering from a nervous breakdown is better able to face the world in mufti, he was obliged to give extensive orders at tailor's and outfitters' for a complete lay equipment. As Archie Garnett he had been in such a hurry to come home and make sure of Peggy that he had brought only the contents of the two suitcases which had aroused Mrs. Garnett's contempt. He had, of course, worn Gilbert's episcopal garb during the voyage, relieved by lighter wear of an obviously clerical cut in the hot days. Gilbert had brought very little luggage, too, and that mainly designed to sustain the rôle of Archie Garnett. The real Archie shrank from appearing in the loud-patterned checks and brilliant ties and socks which had no doubt been purchased in Sydney ready-made. Gilbert must have had execrable taste, but then he had lived for years amongst savages who wore as few garments as possible. Archie discovered his store of money running low. How soon would Peggy be able to handle her (really his) wealth, and secretly make over a share?

All too certainly the Bishop found that his recent association with a murder involved an unpleasant notoriety. After the tailor's he went to a cinema by way of relaxation. In the vestibule another reporter recognized and accosted him. Archie gave him no information, but an article, purporting to be written by the Bishop of Wurrumpoopa, bearing the enthralling heading: *How my Cousin was Lured to His Doom*, subsequently appeared in a Sunday newspaper. The daily ones were full of the crime, which as yet presented no features likely to lead to the solving of the mystery. He thought of Peggy delivered to the mercy of the Press as soon as her heiress-ship leaked out, and ground his excellent teeth.

Although he would not reach Broadcaster until after eight o'clock he decided to travel back the same night. Daylight-Saving was just over, so that it was almost dark by the time he stepped out of the train from St. Pancras at Broomridge Junction. He had to cross a couple of platforms and get into a local crawler, consisting of half-a-dozen dirty carriages and an excessively noisy engine. There was a woman in the far corner of the compartment he entered, but the light was too dim for him to distinguish her face. She had a number of small parcels beside her and sat gazing out of the window.

The train jerked and groaned into action. It wound its way through rolling, spreading country, mysterious under the shadows of encroaching night. The air, harvest-scented, blew in at the open window from over the empty fields. The Bishop drew a long breath. This was England—England and home—so utterly different from the burning Australian land, the sights and sounds that had formed his life for the past nine years. He watched the pale lights springing up in scattered cottages, the dark ripples of water when the train passed stream or pond, and the tall majesty of woods. Eagerly he found

himself gazing for farms and homesteads associated with his boyhood. The old landmarks, the old memories, softened his stern, tanned face. It was good to contemplate a time when this absurd masquerade would be no longer necessary, when he should assume his own name and place, and with Peggy beside him settle down to a life of interest and usefulness in his own corner of the world. The meadowsweet was scarcely finished. A breath of it drifted to his nostrils. . . .

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Gilbert—my lord, I should say. I'm afraid you've forgotten me."

The Bishop came out of his reverie with a leap. The woman in the corner had addressed him, leaning forward a little as she spoke. It was Wade.

Archie's mind worked rapidly. Wade, in his recollection, was a nonentity, always the perfect family servant, an ideal housekeeper, inclined to resent the incursions of Gilbert and himself as noisy schoolboys into her spotless precincts, but kind enough where jam tarts and the drying of boyish garments, soaked through trespassing or illegal fishing, were concerned. He had casually questioned Hugh Singleton about her and learned that she had given up her position as housekeeper to become Mrs. Garnett's maid. Cordially he shook her hand.

"I beg your pardon. This carriage is so dark. Well, Wade, how are you?"

"Quite well, thank you, my lord."

She sat looking at him, her face ageless, inscrutable. How unchanged she was! He moved uneasily. Was it possible that she might recognize him, in spite of the likeness, in spite of Gilbert's clothes?

"How is my aunt?" he inquired hastily.

"Mrs. Garnett is pretty well, thank you, my lord. She has had a great shock." The low, toneless voice was unaltered too.

"Of course. She ought to go away for a change." He uttered the suggestion heartily, the wish being father to the thought.

"I'm sorry you won't come and see her, my lord." Wade spoke with hesitation. "I take the liberty of speaking like this, having been with the family so long."

He reassured her hastily. "It's no liberty. I have the best of reasons for not coming." He hesitated. He would have liked to ask her to come and see him, to talk over old times, but it was too dangerous. He had no quarrel with Wade, only he feared her sharp eyes.

The train drew into a little station, a mere strip of wooden platform beside a fir plantation. A porter, with a flaring link, ran along the roofs of the carriages, lighting the gas in each. The Bishop and Wade exchanged smiles.

"It's rather good to find something that hasn't altered." He laughed. "You'd think they'd scrap these old carriages and get new ones with electric light, but here they still are. And the gas smells as badly as ever."

The train re-started.

"You'll have come across a good many changes in Broadcaster, my lord," Wade observed.

"Oh, dozens. The shops, and all those new houses outside." He talked rapidly, hoping to keep her off the topic of the murder, if indeed she had the bad taste to allude to it.

He wondered how far Wade might be in her mistress's confidence. Not very far, he decided, and studied her sallow, unvarying face in the light cast by the flickering, singing gas. She looked much more the sort of woman to have plenty of secrets of her own. He made a remark that seemed in keeping with his assumed character.

"Mr. Singleton tells me that your nephew has joined St. Cleopas. I think I noticed him on Sunday evening in the choir. A very sweet voice."

"Yes, my lord. My sister isn't too pleased, nor Tann, but the boy's very happy." Wade's lips twitched. "He's a limb, that lad. Gives the vicar and Miss Peggy no end of trouble."

Archie wondered apprehensively whether Zackery Tann had informed his aunt of the midnight visit of the Bishop of Wurrumpoopa and "Miss Peggy" to the church on the night of the murder. He regretted having mentioned him.

"Oh, boys will be boys." He grinned at her. "My cousin and I gave you plenty of trouble in the old days, if you remember."

"You didn't, my lord." Her retort came quickly. "Poor Mr. Archie was the troublesome one."

"Still, I should never have thought he'd made enemies—enemies who'd go to the length of killing him." The Bishop frowned.

"He had one enemy, my lord." Wade's voice dropped, but her eyes did not waver. "Shortly before you were expected on that Sunday night my mistress was seeing Mr. Singleton. She'd sent for him, and gave me orders to bring him in directly he arrived. They were talking for a time, and when the carriage came back with your message that you had gone to the church I went into the boudoir to tell Mrs. Garnett."

She paused. The Bishop prompted her sharply. "Yes?"

"Mr. Singleton seemed very angry and was saying to my mistress that she ought to tell Mr. Archie something or other as soon as he arrived. That postcard, my lord, that there was some talk about at the inquest, saying he was coming, had upset her very much. I couldn't help overhearing what she said to Mr. Singleton."

The Bishop, slightly disgusted, asked: "What?"

Slowly Wade repeated Mrs. Garnett's words. "I'd give a thousand pounds, I'd give my whole fortune, to anyone who'd stop him from coming to the house! It's—queer, isn't it, my lord, that she should say that? And Mr. Archie never came."

"Hugh ought to have told me," the Bishop reflected irritably. Wade's admissions worried him. They added a further stone to the cairn of suspicion against Mrs. Garnett which had grown several feet since his conversation with Captain Campkin. And yet, were such

words anything more than the hysterical ravings of a woman found out in gross deceit and foreseeing an indefinite diet of humble pie? No doubt when she unbosomed herself to her clergyman she had received neither consolation, absolution, nor sympathy.

The train was slowing into Broadcaster. Wade collected her impedimenta of parcels and umbrella and stood up. He got out first and helped her down. "How are you getting home?" he asked.

"I shall walk, my lord."

"Nonsense! Not that dark, lonely road after——" He bit his lip. "You must drive up, Wade."

He hailed a taxi and put her into it, despite her protests. If he had only known, he was nearer betraying himself by the action than he would have cared. Gilbert Gifford, later Bishop of Wurrumpoopo, had always regarded servants as useful machines. Such a piece of thoughtfulness as saving one of them, however old and valued, a long walk, would never have occurred to him. Wade herself was puzzled and softened.

"Mr. Gilbert must have learned different abroad," she reflected. "Now, if it had been Mr. Archie I'd not have felt surprised. *He* was the kind one." Aloud she said: "I'm sure it's too good of you, my lord."

"Stuff! Oh, you might drop me at the Broadcaster Arms, will you? Saves me a few yards' walking."

The taxi sped through the lighted streets. How respectable the town looked, how prosperous, how safe. It required a strong imagination to picture it as the setting for a cruel murder. Wade suddenly turned to him.

"I beg your pardon, my lord"—her words were low and hesitating—"but as you won't come to the house, I probably shan't be seeing you again to ask. If it's not a liberty, I'd like to hear how Laura is."

Archie's brain reeled. In the name of fortune, who, or what, was Laura? Was she maid, wife, widow, animal, vegetable or mineral? Was she a pet? If so, of what nature? She might be cat, dog, rabbit, cow, or horse. The name alone gave the clue to her sex. Laura must belong to the female species—of something. What new and terrible complication was about to ensnare him?

"I haven't heard very lately." It was the safest remark he could manufacture on the spur of the moment.

Wade sighed. "She's not a good correspondent. Of course I don't expect her to write often to me, my lord, but I didn't think that because she'd—she'd got up in the world, so to speak, she'd drop me altogether. I—I feel it very much." Her eyes were moist.

"Of course. Most natural. Laura'll have to be scolded." The taxi mercifully stopped and he sprang out. "I'll let you know the minute I have any news of her." A safe promise, he reflected.

"Thank you, my lord." Wade looked hard at him. "Oh, you are like Mr. Archie!" she exclaimed impulsively. Then she reddened through her sallow skin, murmured an apology, and the taxi carried her away.

The discomfited bishop retreated to the fastnesses of his bedroom in the Broadcaster Arms. It was confoundedly awkward, this impersonation of a cousin whom he had not seen for a number of years, then encountered casually in Australia, and finally travelled home with in the same ship. Their rôles had of necessity kept them apart. They had not even shared a cabin. Gilbert had told Archie literally nothing of his private life. After their first meeting at Sydney Archie had summed the Bishop up as a celibate fanatic with the brain of a world reformer, the narrowness of a Calvin, and the thin-lipped determination of the professional soul-saver. He had mentioned that Mrs. Garnett and Hugh Singleton were his sole correspondents in Broadcaster, and their letters only reached him at long intervals, owing to the distances and isolated position of his diocese. During the fortnight which followed between their meeting and the departure for home the cousins had not seen one another. The Bishop had gone to Melbourne on some final business, and Archie had been fully occupied with a hurried settlement of his own affairs during his absence. They had foregathered, as arranged, the night before the voyage. Gilbert had voiced his fear of "enemies", and proposed this masquerade which had led so far. How much further? Archie wondered gloomily. He saw himself sinking into deeper waters. Who the devil was Laura, and what had she to do with Wade, and why should the Bishop of Wurrumpoopa be expected to know anything about her?

He dined, and later went to St. Cleopas' vicarage. Hugh was out at a choir practice and Ethel occupied in putting the children to bed. Archie enjoyed a blissful half-hour with Peggy, to whom he confided his day's experiences and perplexities.

"Laura?" She repeated the name with wrinkled brow. "The only one I can remember is that pretty cousin of Gilbert's on the Gifford side, but she married ages ago and died out in India."

"Can't be this Laura, then. Unless Gilbert went to meet her the might he——" Both shivered.

"That reminds me——" Archie told his fiancée of the conversations he had had, first with Captain Campkin and later with Wade.

Peggy sat wide-eyed. "Archie, that proves it. Mrs. Garnett did it. Oh, can't you have her arrested, and then we'll feel safe?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Not enough evidence, darling: mere suspicions go no way with a jury. Oh, I admit that she deliberately gave a false impression, pretending that she came home by Acacia Road, but we can't prove that she had anything to do with the murder."

"Well, if she didn't murder Gilbert, who did?"

CHAPTER X

THE PROVERBIAL CALM after the storm descended upon Broadcaster. The adjourned inquest had yielded no fresh evidence, and culminated in a reluctant verdict, more or less anticipated, of "Wilful murder against some person or persons unknown." In the town and neighbourhood the crime was still the principal topic of conversation, but the world outside Broadcaster was fast forgetting the nine-days' wonder and sensation, particularly without the fresh stimulus and excitement of an arrest.

The Bishop was still at Broadcaster. Trusting to Providence or Peggy to pay the rent, he had taken a small furnished house for six months. It rejoiced in the name of Rose Cottage and stood a short distance from the town, one of the pretty, lesser houses lining the lower part of Acacia Road.

A quarterly payment of the Bishop of Wurrumpoopo's private income had relieved Archie's temporary embarrassment and increased his pangs of conscience. Gilbert wrote a large, dashing hand, fatally easy to imitate, but the amateur forger, guiltily endorsing the cheque, hated himself. It seemed so mean to spend Gilbert's money without Gilbert's sanction. The money would never have been willed to *him*, Archie reflected grimly. Necessity knew no law, as Peggy had, as yet, been paid over none of her fortune. She was still at the vicarage, behaving just as usual, in spite of having received eight sackfuls of begging letters and forty-nine proposals of marriage.

The Bishop had taxed Hugh Singleton with concealing particulars of the interview which he had had with Mrs. Garnett, and especially her concluding wild words. The vicar protested that he had thought them merely hysterical, based on a guilty conscience, and of no importance. She had proved to himself, the Coroner and jury that on the Sunday night she walked straight home from church and had seen nothing of her stepson. The Bishop made no mention of Captain Campkin's disclosure, deciding that the fewer people who knew it the better, but his suspicions of Mrs. Garnett died hard. Meantime, how much longer was this farce to continue?

A nervous breakdown was a capital thing. It headed off clerical callers, formed a splendid excuse for refusing to preach, confirm, marry, bury, baptize, conduct retreats, hold Quiet Days, attend diocesan conferences, or advise young people. Upon Peggy's suggestion he had had a paragraph inserted in *The Church Chimes*, *The Warden*, and *The Anglo-Catholic Times*, stating that the Bishop of Wurrumpoopo was home on furlough, but had been ordered by his medical advisers to take a complete rest. He was forbidden to do any work, or to attend to correspondence.

So far, excellent. On the other hand it was advisable to be in the open air as much as possible. The Bishop was not prevented from playing golf, taking long walks, or enjoying any other form of

active exercise which presented itself. Hugh Singleton grew secretly a little disappointed in his quondam friend. He was hard-pressed, if not actually overworked, and would gladly have welcomed the Bishop's assistance in the shape of an occasional sermon or the taking of an early Celebration.

"I suppose he is really forbidden to do anything, but I must say he looks uncommonly fit," the perplexed vicar told his wife. "I did think yesterday when I had Mattins and a Choral Celebration, and two funerals immediately afterwards, that he might have offered to take one or the other, but he didn't, and I wasn't going to suggest it."

Ethel sniffed meaningly. "Horribly selfish of him. And another thing, Hugh. Have you noticed that except on Sundays he never comes to church?"

(And so said Broadcaster, including the ritualistic rector of St. Michael and All Angels, the modernist vicar of St. Mary Magdalene's, the Reverend Mr. Salter of the Baptist chapel, Fathers O'Rafferty and Macnamara of the Roman Catholic one, and all the ladies who composed the congregations associated with these places of worship. Except once on Sundays the Bishop of Wurrumpoopo never went to church.)

"And that's only an excuse to sit in our pew and walk home with Peggy." Ethel looked darkly at her husband. "And—I'm sorry to say it of my own sister, Hugh—but Peggy is just as selfish as Gilbert. She might at least offer to pay for a curate for you and a second servant for me, but she's never even suggested doing anything for either of us with Archie's money."

"She hasn't got it yet."

"No—and I don't believe she wants it a bit. She always shuts me up when I mention it, or ask her how she intends to spend it."

"What about your notion that she and Gilbert were going to make a match of it?"

Ethel looked dubious. "I don't know about a match, but I'm certain that there's some secret between them. He was here yesterday, and I came into the drawing-room to find them talking most earnestly, and—and he wasn't making love to her."

"I hope you didn't listen." The vicar spoke sharply.

"I couldn't help hearing two sentences." Ethel drew herself up with dignity. "Peggy said: 'As soon as ever the lawyers pay the first instalment of that money you shall have every penny'. And instead of refusing, or even saying Thank you, Gilbert said: 'I wish they'd hurry. I'm deuced hard up.'"

"Ethel!"

"It's perfectly true. I nearly fainted, and they both looked so secretive and ashamed directly they saw me. Hugh, do you think Gilbert can be blackmailing Peggy?"

"Really, it looks like it. But what can he know against her?"

Ethel's eyes dropped. "Hugh, it must be in connection with Archie's murder. I've thought and thought—— You weren't here when Ruby burst in and told Peggy and me about it. You'd think

Peggy would have had hysterics or something, not only hearing that Archie'd come home after all that time, but that he'd been murdered." She shivered. "Not dead—*murdered*. Well, she took it quite calmly, and then you and Gilbert came in."

"I remember. She was perfectly quiet, didn't make a bit of fuss."

"Then doesn't it look *as though she expected to hear of his body being found?*"

"Ethel, you mustn't. That's preposterous."

"I know it sounds so, Hugh, but if you remember Peggy was alone here that evening just at the—the time. Archie may have come here, and gone out with her, and they may have quarrelled, and she——"

"But what has Gilbert got to do with it?"

"I don't know, only if it isn't blackmail why is he taking Peggy's money? Peggy's the soul of generosity, or used to be. You remember how upset she was when Aunt Mary left her that fifty pounds and nothing to me because I was married? Yet she won't offer a reward for the discovery of the murderer, as Mr. Garth proposed. It's all most puzzling."

"Where is she this afternoon?"

"Playing golf with Gilbert on Tatton links. Which means that I'll have to go presently and pour out tea for the Sunday-school teachers from St. Michael's." The ritualistic rector of that church, being a bachelor, had occasionally to borrow a brother-priest's wife for such functions. Ethel, who did not share the Bishop of Wurrumpoopa's views as to the celibacy of the clergy, usually despatched Peggy on these occasions in the hope that her attractions might undermine the rector's similar principles, which she called prejudices. Now it appeared that instead of becoming her brother-in-law she was to be saddled indefinitely with an aggravating ecclesiastic who, in place of marrying her sister, was secretly blackmailing her. The curate and the additional servant seemed further off than ever. Ethel sighed.

The blackmailer and his victim, neither of whom looked the part, thoroughly enjoyed their game. Peggy beat the Bishop one up and two to play, entertained him afterwards to tea at the pretty little club-house, and parted from him with the utmost cordiality. He saw her home, but did not ask her to invite him in. It had dawned on him disagreeably once or twice recently that Mrs. Singleton did not like him and if he came to the house manœuvred that he should not be alone with her sister.

"I wish Peggy'd let me give out that we're engaged," the Bishop soliloquized. "We're about so much together that people are bound to begin to talk. What a fool I was to allow myself to go on with this wretched deception!"

He repeated the remark with considerably more emphasis later during the evening.

Rose Cottage was small and ivy-clad, standing back from the dust

and traffic of the high road in a pretty garden. Scents blown across the moors behind the house stole in at the lattice-paned windows. The Bishop admitted himself with his latch-key and entered a low-ceilinged, square hall, dark with old paintings and heavily-moulded doors. He stopped to pick up the afternoon post, which lay, a solitary white square, in the centre of an ancient brass tray that glimmered upon the dark lake of a carved mahogany table. The letter he carried into a little sun-bleached drawing-room at the back of the hall, smelling of dead roses. The October evening was closing in. He slit the envelope and, standing by the window, tilted the large sheet of paper enclosed in it to catch the failing light.

The communication was in excellent typewriting. The Bishop read the printed heading, "Garbage & Gush, Ltd., Publishers, 12-14, Authors' Mall, Westminster, S.W.1," with knit brows. Bother the fellows! Another journalistic bait, probably. On account of his close connection with the victim of the Broadcaster murder he had already been asked to write a series of articles for one of the less classical Sunday papers, and Gilbert's publishers, the Christian Press, had written to him, reporting a slight increase in the sales of *What thank have Ye?* and a smaller volume of Lenten addresses. To a man who hated letter-writing and found the compiling of a postcard distasteful and difficult the newspaper proprietor's offer had held out no attractions, although the money was a tremendous temptation. He would turn down this one directly he had read the letter, displaying equal firmness. The action would be quite in keeping with his adopted character, an assumption of shocked surprise and distaste. He glanced over the missive, casually at first, then with a growing consternation, incredulity, and horror.

Dear Sir:

With reference to our contract, by which you were to submit to us the MS. of your next twelve novels, we write to ask when the first of these will be ready. The sales of "The Smell in the Study" and "The Man with the Red Nose" have been so satisfactory that we urge you to follow up these novels with another on the same lines as speedily as possible. We expected to have the manuscript in our hands before this, as we are now making active preparations for bringing out our spring list of books, and are strongly desirous of including your forthcoming novel amongst them. We would remind you that "The story's the thing," and that a moral, or morals, are quite out of date.

Trusting for an early and favourable reply,

We are, with compliments,

Faithfully yours,

Pro GARBAGE AND GUSH, LTD.

Henry Bremner.

THE RIGHT REV. THE BISHOP OF WURRUMPOOPA,

Rose Cottage,

Broadcaster.

The Bishop stood paralysed. Professionally affixed to the first sheet was the second, containing a lengthy postscript.

If, at any time, you could see your way to giving us a personal call we should esteem it a favour. We fully appreciate that your time ever since your return to England has been occupied in a somewhat painful manner, but we had anticipated that you would seek an interview with us, thereby obviating much correspondence. We have, of course, faithfully respected your wishes as regards the concealment of your identity with "Aubrey Pouncebox," but would beg to suggest to you that in view of the public interest aroused by the recent tragedy with which you have been closely associated this would be a most favourable opportunity of coming out into the open.

Archie Garnett tottered to the nearest chair. The thing could not be true. His wildest dreams, his worst anticipations had never glanced at such a coil as this. He read the letter again. He read it three times. There it was in purple typewriting ink, on stiff, expensive paper (paper paid for by the wretched authors whom Garbage and Gush exploited so mercilessly), the staggering, incredible, yet nevertheless substantiated fact. His cousin Gilbert, the dead and buried Bishop of Wurrumpoopa, author of *What thank have Ye?*, *The Narrow Way*, and *Duty and Discipline*, in whose shoes, or rather gaiters, he, Archie Garnett, happened at the moment to be sitting, was—Aubrey Pouncebox.

CHAPTER XI

THE MORE HE thought of it the more fantastic and impossible the thing appeared. For purposes of safety he had glanced through Hugh Singleton's copies of Gilbert's devotional books, prim, tepid, re-hashed sermons, clad in chaste purple covers, and had decided that as a literary light his cousin would never have set the Thames on fire. But now Gilbert stood revealed, a best-seller, the author of novels which made the success of *The Unvarying Virgin*, and *If Winter never Goes* seem slight things. Archie was not a reading man, being too fond of the open air, but Aubrey Pouncebox catered for precisely such as he. He told an excellent story that put no strain on the intellect, and at the same time had a style and poise which won the praise of some of the best critics of the day. On the *Kangaroo* his novels had been popular and discussed. Little did the passengers reckon who was in their midst.

And now he, Archie, who had rashly assumed the name and status of the Bishop of Wurrumpoopa, found himself in addition

saddled with this changeling, this dual personality. If only Gilbert had dropped the smallest hint! He clutched the letter in a damp hand. He was pledged to produce twelve novels, and not merely novels, but best-sellers, the first of which was evidently due immediately. How could he? And if he did not, what would happen? Would he be sent to prison for breach of contract? Should he—dared he—confess? He shrank from the wrath of Messrs. Garbage and Gush when they learned that their goose, whose golden eggs they were greedily anticipating, would lay, or rather write, no more. What was to be done?

After a sleepless night, without confiding his new trouble to the usual repository for such (i.e. Peggy), the Bishop fled to London. Garbage and Gush had pleaded for a personal call. They should have it. Armoured with his nervous breakdown, he would seek an interview with the firm and, without betraying himself, discover exactly how far he was committed. They might prove easy to deal with. They might let him off the remainder of that harrowing agreement. Little did he know of the flinty hearts of publishers.

Authors' Mall was solid in structure, set down in the midst of clanging traffic, a row of great, grey buildings whose doors continually admitted or disgorged hurrying individuals. After prowling cautiously up its length on one side and retracing his laggard footsteps down the other, the Bishop at last identified the place from whence Messrs. Garbage and Gush's works were issued to a delighted and ever-increasing public. The alliteration of their combined names sprawled across the window in conspicuous gilt lettering. Tentatively the Bishop pushed back a swing door and found himself in a short, gloomy passage. At the end another similar door admitted him into an office whose sacred precincts were rigidly guarded from all intruders by a formidable-looking counter. The aggressive click of typewriters sounded from an adjacent room, and several new books, bearing the imprint of the firm, sat on the said counter in solid piles.

An impudent-faced boy, with a wide mouth and prominent ears, lunged forward as the Bishop approached. He was wearing Gilbert's episcopal get-up in order to look more impressive and to further the deception.

"Yes?" inquired the boy.

"I want to see Mr. Garbage."

"There's no Mr. Garbage."

"Well, Mr. Gush then."

"Ain't no Mr. Gush either."

"Isn't this the publishing firm of Garbage and Gush? I certainly saw the name on the window."

"That's right."

The Bishop drew himself to his full height. Really, the manners of the rising generation were intolerable. "I must see someone in authority. Who is there?"

The boy scratched his head with a pencil-end. "There's Mr. Knox

—he's the business manager—and there's Mr. Bremner and Mr. Saddletree, the directors."

"Thank you. I'll see all three. Take my name, please." He laid his card—Gilbert's card—on the counter.

The boy picked it up, spelled out the name, and put the card down. "Is it about a book? We don't publish church stuff," he drawled.

The Bishop was growing tired. "Look here, my lad"—unconsciously he slipped into the tone which he had been accustomed to use to recalcitrant "hands" on his Australian sheep-run—"that'll do. I have a letter from your principals urging me to call, and I don't leave without seeing one or other of them."

The boy seemed suitably impressed. "Well, my lord, I'll take your card to Mr. Bremner, but unless you've got an appointment——"

"You take him my card," advised the Bishop affably.

He checked himself on the verge of telling the boy to announce him as Aubrey Pouncebox. The fewer people who knew the secret the better. Gilbert had evidently stipulated that his identity was not to be revealed. He waited for several minutes, and then looked up at the clatter of running feet. A large man, with clean-shaven jaw and greedy black eyes, was hastening towards him. His face was irradiated, his hand outstretched.

"My dear Bishop! How prompt! How delightful! You got my letter? But why didn't you wire? Why didn't you 'phone? I wouldn't have missed you for anything, and we might have had a nice little lunch together." He turned on the crestfallen boy. "And this young idiot kept you waiting, instead of bringing you to me at once!"

"The name told him nothing," faltered the Bishop. So here was the reception accorded to the writers of best-sellers!

"That's your modesty, my dear sir. Now, if only you'd allow us to let the public into our little secret——"

"No, no, no," quavered the Bishop. "Really, I couldn't."

Mr. Bremner—the boy telegraphed the name to the Bishop as he passed, and received instant absolution—slid a playful arm round the nerveless episcopal elbow.

"Well, well, we can discuss all that at our leisure. Very glad you came up to town. A personal interview is so much more satisfactory than writing."

He marched the Bishop up some stairs, down a passage and into a gaudy, over-furnished room. A smart young lady typist was taking down a letter to the headlong dictation of a thin man with pince-nez and untidy hair. This was Mr. Knox, whose flair for spotting the winner amongst potential novelists had become a proverb in publishing circles. He had a constitution of iron, a heart of brass, and never minded how rude he was in person or on paper. Mr. Knox drew up all the contracts connected with the firm, and dealt personally with dissatisfied authors. "Stonewall" Knox was his nick-name, and one justly earned.

The Bishop was introduced. Mr. Knox disposed of the young

lady with startling rapidity and got to business. His rapture on at last beholding Aubrey Pouncebox in the flesh was considerably more modified than Mr. Bremner's.

"Well, now, about the new novel? Have you brought it with you, Bishop?"

The Bishop gasped. "No, indeed I haven't. It's—it's not written."

His words produced consternation.

"Not written?" squealed Mr. Bremner.

"Not written?" shouted Mr. Knox.

The Bishop felt amazed at his own courage. "No, it's not written," he repeated firmly. "And I don't think it ever will be."

Consternation yielded to chaos.

"Why not?" panted Mr. Knox.

"My dear sir, your contract——" hinted Mr. Bremner.

"I am suffering from nervous breakdown." The Bishop spoke with dignity. "How can I write novels?"

"A nervous breakdown? Oh, dear, dear, dear!" whined Mr. Bremner.

"Nervous fiddlesticks! You look the picture of health." Mr. Knox's eyes were like flint behind their glasses. "The voyage home ought to have set you up."

"I—I was perfectly well on the voyage. It was afterwards. My cousin's murder——" The Bishop stammered and faltered.

"Now, that's just it." Mr. Knox rushed upon his opportunity. "That murder has given us the biggest chance of an advertisement which the firm's ever had. If only you'd come out into the open, Bishop, admit that you are Aubrey Pouncebox——"

The Bishop began a strangled "But I'm not," and felt the words die in his throat. Mr. Knox resumed.

"There won't have been anything like it since the occasion when we brought out *Double Beds* by Eileen Parsons, and she threw herself over Waterloo Bridge on the day of publication, clasping her six presentation copies. That book went into eighteen editions in a fortnight."

"Was she drowned?" inquired the Bishop apprehensively.

"Who? Eileen Parsons? Not a little bit of it. Rescued by a steam-launch, and married the owner—a peer's eldest son—within a week. Tremendous double sensation, and of course the book boomed." Mr. Knox sighed. "The worst of it was that we hadn't contracted with her for further work, and Graball and Graball got hold of her at once."

The Bishop shook his head. "I decline absolutely to make capital, or to allow you to make it, out of my unfortunate cousin's death." He added yet more firmly: "Of course my—my *nom-de-plume*, the concealment of my identity, is part of our agreement."

"Certainly." Both publishers purred. "That is in your contract."

"Might I see a copy of it? I left my own with my—my man of business in Wurrumpopa."

The contract was produced. The Bishop knit his brows over it. Ten per cent royalties on all copies of *The Smell in the Study* after the sale of the first fifteen hundred, and the same preposterous terms for *The Man with the Red Nose*. Afterwards, seven and a half per cent on all copies sold of any future work. He looked meditatively at the two men. Of course he was densely ignorant of publishing conditions, but it occurred to him that Garbage and Gush certainly did not stand to lose on the transaction. His blood boiled. Gilbert must have been shamefully swindled.

"I'm not at all satisfied with this contract," he announced boldly.

"I understood from our business manager in Melbourne that at the time it was drawn up you raised no objection to any of the clauses, my lord." Mr. Knox spoke dryly.

"I had had no experience of publishing then." The Bishop felt astonishingly brave. "I really don't see my way to giving you a third book on these terms."

Mr. Knox slipped the button off his foil. "You'll have to," he snapped.

"I shan't." The Bishop's eyes blazed. "Not another line do I write for your firm."

"You can't submit work to any other firm until we have accepted or refused the last of your next twelve novels." Mr. Knox pointed out the fact nastily. "Allow me to refer you to Clause Six of our existing contract."

Mr. Bremner sighed deeply. "If you would tell us the terms which this other firm has offered you, we might see our way——" He subsided under Mr. Knox's glare.

"What other firm?"

"The one which has made you an offer for your next book. You should have told them that you had contracted with us for several more, really you should." Mr. Bremner looked deeply pained.

Archie Garnett was far from stupid. In his own phraseology he "tumbled to it" that Garbage and Gush's representatives had scented an offer for Aubrey Pouncebox's new novel from another publishing house. He pondered. Legally he supposed that they were justified in holding him to this scandalous agreement, but in all probability they would not care for their deliberate exploiting of a simple-minded ecclesiastic to be made public. He might threaten to expose them by consulting a lawyer, and if they preferred the bribery of better terms he could instead stipulate either for a longer time in which to give them his book, or a complete renunciation of any claim upon it. He cleared his throat.

"I'm not going to give away the other firm—firms, I should say." At the tantalizing plural he saw raised eyebrows and a significant interchange of glances. "But my last word is this: I'm damned if I write another line for your b—— firm unless we arrange for totally different terms——"

"I do not think——" faltered Mr. Bremner. A bishop swearing! Even being a colonial bishop did not excuse the lapse.

"Never!" yelled Mr. Knox. His face expressed far worse language than any the Bishop had used.

The Bishop rose. "Very well, then. Good morning."

"Don't go." Mr. Bremner hurled himself between the Bishop and the door.

"Sit down, Bremner, and don't be a fool," recommended Mr. Knox. He turned to the Bishop. "Now, Bishop, this is how you stand. Either you write for us, or you can't write for anybody."

"Thank you." The Bishop moved doorwards. "That suits me exactly."

"You don't want to write?" Mr. Bremner exhibited symptoms of hysteria.

"No, I don't."

"But, my dear sir! Bishop, think of your public."

"I prefer to think of myself. Plenty of other authors."

"Only one Aubrey Pouncebox." The reminder came almost tearfully from Mr. Bremner.

"That's it. Only one Aubrey Pouncebox. We're putting our cards on the table." Mr. Knox snapped out the admission. "You can't seriously mean, Bishop, that you intend to give up writing?"

"How can I write with a nervous breakdown?"

"Have you really got one?"

"Certainly," replied the Bishop with dignity.

Mr. Knox looked suspicious and unconvinced. "Who said so?"

"A—a London nerve-specialist. It's not etiquette to give his name."

"Harris!" snorted Mr. Knox.

"No, it wasn't Harris." At the Bishop's innocence Mr. Knox grew purple with suppressed mirth.

There was a long silence. Typewriters clicked and clattered in an adjoining room.

"We'd better get to business." Mr. Knox sat down and opened a bulging roll-top desk. "How much do you want, Bishop?"

The Bishop drew a long breath. Evidently these men would concede anything sooner than lose Aubrey Pouncebox. "A year to write my next novel in——"

A faint howl from Mr. Bremner interrupted him. Mr. Knox, who was displaying indications of incipient apoplexy, slammed down the lid of the desk.

"A year? Impossible!"

"Quite impossible!"

"It's less impossible than not getting the book at all."

The publishers exchanged significant looks. "Is that everything?"

"No." Archie's brain worked rapidly. "I must have a sum down in advance." He named a figure which seemed to him munificent, but which left the two men aghast at his moderation. "Then—— I'm no good at this per cent business. I'll get a lawyer to look over the contract."

"No, no, no." Mr. Bremner raised imploring hands. "We'll give you twelve per cent on every copy sold."

Those that don't ask, don't want. An admirable adage. "Fifteen, I think you mean?" suggested the Bishop affably.

"Fifteen, then," moaningly amended Mr. Knox.

"And American, Colonial, dramatic, cinema, and serial rights," continued the Bishop pleasantly. The words had caught his eye when glancing through the contract, although he was utterly in the dark as to their value.

"I always thought Shylock ought to have been a clergyman." Mr. Knox's bitter comment went unheeded by episcopal ears.

"I should like everything in writing, please." The Bishop sat down and gazed out of the window.

The two partners conferred together in lowered tones. Nervous breakdown, my foot! The fellow, confound him, had all his wits about him. Yet he had not seemed at first to care about the money. He was evidently wishful to leave off writing, or to write at his own leisure. Both sighed heavily.

"A year's delay is a very serious thing, Bishop," Mr. Knox reminded him. "You may lose your public, and, as a novel has to be worked through the trade first, it can't appear for several months until after it is completed. Couldn't you say a trifle sooner?"

"No, I couldn't." The Bishop spoke firmly.

"Sewage and Slush are bringing out Horace Purplepatches' new novel this autumn," lamented Mr. Bremner. "What's the title?" He frowned. "Something very fetching, I remember. Oh, *Pamela the Prostitute*."

The Bishop endeavoured to live up to his assumed character. "Disgusting!" he expostulated. "Ought to be banned."

A gleam of hope lit up Mr. Bremner's wan countenance. "Now, there's an idea for you." He spoke softly, insinuatingly. "You are quite determined, I take it, not to allow us to reveal your identity as Aubrey Pouncebox. Yes? Very well. Then, as Bishop of Wurrumpoopa, why not ban your next novel? Think of the advertisement!"

Mr. Knox roared with laughter. The Bishop's face of disgust only added to his mirth. "Think it over, Bishop, think it over," he advised genially.

The Bishop gasped. "Of all the underhand, deceitful—— Why, in Australia I've ducked a fellow in the creek for less." Suddenly he remembered that Wurrumpoopa was not in Australia, and that a bishop must be no brawler. "I think that is all we need discuss at present," he added with dignity.

"Will you wait for the new contract, or shall we post it to you?" Mr. Bremner asked.

The Bishop looked wary. "I'll take it now, thanks."

Mr. Knox summoned a young lady with a heavily powdered face and dictated in a series of hisses the clauses of the fresh agreement. She carried it off to be typed and duplicated. Mr. Bremner was called

away by the boy in the outer office. The Bishop sat studying Garbage and Gush's latest catalogue. What reviews Gilbert's books had enjoyed, what sales, what popularity! He began to be distinctly sorry that he had not stood out for a much bigger sum on account and demanded larger royalties.

Back came Mr. Knox, genial once more, and playfully mysterious. "Who do you think has just arrived, Knox?" he began. He beamed at the Bishop. "A friend of yours," he told him. "I'll bring him straight in."

The Bishop mustered a sickly smile. Mr. Bremner, with the same air of secrecy that haloes a conjurer about to produce rabbits out of somebody's Sunday hat, disappeared. Archie sat in a state of perspiring resignation. What ghost from Gilbert's past was going to descend upon him?

CHAPTER XII

THE GHOST WAS fairly substantial. As he engulfed the Bishop's hand, damp with apprehension, in a sun-burned paw, the impostor became aware of a burly body and an immense, mahogany-coloured face, on the peeling nose of which a pair of horn-rimmed glasses balanced precariously. It was nobody whom he had ever seen before, but mercifully Mr. Knox was in the same situation.

"Knox, this is Mr. MacScrew, the manager of our Melbourne branch," introduced Mr. Bremner. "First time you two've met, but you've exchanged plenty of letters, eh?"

"That is so. Pleased to meet you, sir." The owner of the sun-burned hand cordially shook Mr. Knox's paler London one. The Australian accent, the reference to Melbourne, brought back a rush of happy memories, causing the Bishop to forget his panic in a spasm of home-sickness.

"It is odd that you should turn up just when the Bishop was here." Mr. Bremner nodded reflectively. "We've been having—er—a little business talk."

"And how soon's the new *Magnum Opus* to be out?" Mr. MacScrew's inquiry was accompanied by a cordial and comprehensive wink. "I suppose it's been in your hands some time?" he told the publishers. "When the Bishop looked me up a few days before he sailed he said that he'd only to revise it—he'd do that during the voyage—and get it typed in London."

There was an awful silence. Mr. Knox and Mr. Bremner turned faces, pallid with reproach and shocked incredulity, towards the cowering bishop. Such deceit! What duplicity! A church dignitary to descend to these depths of infamy and slyness! To pretend that

he required time in which to write another novel, to screw a year's grace and immense additional concessions and cash out of a hard-working firm of publishers, when all the while the book was written, finished, ready for the typist, almost ready for the press! Their horror at such ungentlemanly conduct was beyond words. Both recovered breath and vocabulary to tell him so immediately.

The Bishop sat speechless under the combined spate of their reproaches. His brain was busy. He remembered Gilbert's references to "enemies". Could these have any connection with his double life as Aubrey Pouncebox? Was he afraid of being robbed of a best-seller? Yet why murder Archie Garnett, who never published a line in his life? Also, there had been no trace of a manuscript amongst the murdered man's belongings. Oh, that there had been! What could have become of it?

He lied boldly, with the courage of desperation.

"If I might be allowed a word"—his raised hand silenced the two—"I can explain. I—er—revised the manuscript on the voyage home, but it was so bad that I——"

"Don't!" screamed Mr. Bremner. "Bishop, you're not going to tell us that you destroyed it?"

Archie burned his boats. "I threw it overboard," he replied.

Mr. MacScrew rose. "You threw overboard *Trumpets in the New Moon*, the best thing you've done yet? Oh, how criminal, how deplorable! Was there *no one* to restrain you?"

"Then you'd seen it?" almost bellowed Mr. Knox.

"Seen it? Bless you, yes." He turned to the Bishop. "Don't you remember sending it to me, the rough copy, and I gave it back with one or two suggestions when you called on me just before sailing? That episode of Celia and the grocer's assistant, for instance——"

"I don't remember." The Bishop faced the trio with the desperate courage of an early Christian martyr confronting three large lions. "I—I told you that I'd had a nervous breakdown. I forget nearly everything. I—I don't remember looking you up in Melbourne," he informed Mr. MacScrew wildly.

"Perhaps"—Mr. Bremner passed a handkerchief across his brow—"you are subject to slight delusions, Bishop. You may have imagined that you threw the MS. into the sea."

"I'm quite sure that I did. Anyway, there's no trace of it amongst my luggage." He added recklessly: "You can look if you like."

They shook their heads. The wanton destruction of an Aubrey Pouncebox novel was a crime, almost amounting to a national calamity. Suddenly the Bishop had a brain-wave.

"As you saw the stuff, and—and approved of it——" he began.

"Approved!" Mr. MacScrew nearly wept. "I tell you it was your best work. Knocked spots off the other two. Such a plot, such——"

"That's it." The Bishop cut the eulogy short. "Can you remember the plot? I can't, for the life of me. Well, jot it down—a rough summary—and I'll do my best to re-write it."

Mr. MacScrew dashed to the roll-top desk from which he ruthlessly evicted Mr. Knox. He thrust aside press-cuttings, publishers' lists, gum, ink, letters from authors, aspiring, indignant, or threatening, and wrote as if for a wager. As he finished the last word the Bishop, extending a long arm over the itching hands of Messrs. Bremner and Knox, took up the sheet.

"Thank you." He bestowed it in his pocket-book. "I'll do my best, and I hope I shan't want as long as a year." He turned to Mr. Knox. "May I trouble you for that new agreement?" Mr. Knox, with a dazed expression, rang for the contract and handed it over. "I am much obliged. And my cheque for the sum on account?"

As though mesmerized, Mr. Knox made out the cheque. The Bishop re-seated himself, read through the contract, did a little mental arithmetic over the figures on the cheque, pronounced himself satisfied, and stood up. A hush, as of a death-chamber, pervaded the room.

"Good-bye, Mr. Bremner. Glad to have met you." Cordially he shook Mr. Bremner's limp hand.

"Good-bye, Mr. Knox. You have my address? Yes, that's right." He held Stonewall Knox's nerveless fingers in a hearty grip.

"Good-bye, Mr. MacScrew. Pleasant to run across each other like this."

"Very." Mr. MacScrew, recovering his wits, took the proffered right hand. "Hullo!" He retained it, looking down at it curiously.

"What's the matter?" asked the Bishop quickly. A sudden cascade of ice seemed to be descending his spine. His success had made him foolhardy and over-confident. Did this man, who had seen the real Gilbert only a few months before, detect the imposture?

"What's become of your ring—that ring with the curious stone which you used to wear?"

"I lost it just after I got home." He spoke the truth, for the ring had never been seen again. Peggy had searched every inch of the church in daylight with negligible results. The Bishop had decided not to draw attention to his loss by advertising and offering a reward for the ring's return, nor had he mentioned it to the police. It did not strike him as valuable when Gilbert had been so insistent upon his wearing it.

"Well, there doesn't seem much reason for your requiring any ring on that finger." A fat, sunburned digit touched the member described. "I never saw such a wonderful thing as the complete disappearance of that scar. Not a trace left. What did you have done to it?"

"I—I—— Nothing. It just went away."

"Odd. I'd have thought that you were marked for life." He turned to the two publishers. "You really ought to get the Bishop to tell you the yarn of how he got his finger mauled. Make a capital magazine story."

The Bishop managed a wan grin. "You tell them," he murmured.

"All right, if you're too modest." Mr. MacScrew laughed and clapped the shrinking bishop on the shoulder. "Well, it seems that

the Bishop was on a tour, strictly speaking outside his diocese. Wildest part of New Guinea, head-hunters, cannibals, and all that. In one spot he found some natives pretty busy with a human sacrifice. Instead of cutting and running (I'd have sloped mighty smartly, I can tell you) he stopped the whole thing, scared the wits out of the beggars, and released the victim."

"Capital! Bravo, Bishop!" applauded the representatives of Garbage and Gush.

"The rum part of it is that the man he rescued wasn't grateful. He bit the Bishop's finger nearly to the bone. Left a scar that I never thought would fade, and he used to wear a ring to conceal it. Now, look. You wouldn't think there'd been any mark, would you?"

The Bishop's reluctant finger was presented for inspection and pronounced unblemished. He was thankful to get away before any more of Gilbert's exploits shed their glamour about his unworthy head. His dead cousin rose in his estimation. Imagine breaking up a camp of cannibals solus, and nearly getting blood-poisoning into the bargain from the filthy teeth of a beastly ungrateful heathen whom he'd just rescued from martyrdom. No doubt Gilbert would consider it all in the day's work, and only regret that the man-eaters had not stayed to be converted. The story was just like him, a fanatical, heroic, impetuous act. In the street outside the publishing-office Archie suddenly halted and stood rigid.

When they met his cousin was wearing the ring, but had made no mention of the circumstances which necessitated his doing so. A vision came to Archie of the stiff figure in its coffin, with crossed hands above a still breast. *There had been no scar on any of the fingers.* Was the whole tale an invention to glorify himself in the eyes of MacScrew?

In the office which the Bishop had just quitted the two business managers and the director fell upon one another with mutual recriminations.

"Your letter said he was a perfect greenhorn!"

"Knox, your language is both ungentlemanly and unjustifiable. My letters described the Bishop of Wurrumpoopas as I found him—inexperienced in business matters, and quite unaware of the monetary possibilities of his novels."

"MacScrew, you told us that he signed that first contract without objecting to terms, or any of the clauses."

"And now"—Mr. Bremner interposed more in sorrow than in anger—"he pockets a huge cheque, gets a new contract for terms infinitely more favourable to himself, and after that he has the brazenness to admit that he has destroyed a new MS." His voice rose to a wail. "An unpublished novel by Aubrey Pouncebox. Oh! Oh!"

The other two joined in his lamentations.

"But what I can't understand"—Mr. MacScrew's eyes met Mr. Knox's in stark perplexity—"is the complete change in the man him-

self. Voice, manner, totally different. I told you about the first time I ever saw him, didn't I?"

"You told me." Mr. Bremner nodded. "Knox was away when your letter came. I daresay he'd like to hear now."

"I should," corroborated Mr. Knox emphatically.

"Well, it was one day when I wasn't particularly busy. Boy brought in a card. *The Bishop of Wurrumpoopa*. I couldn't think what he wanted with me, as Garbage and Gush don't publish theology. Ha! ha! ha!"

The room echoed to the mirth of all three.

"Of course I knew the chap's name. Big reputation as a preacher, and devilish keen on his job. Used to spend months in the most unhealthy parts of New Guinea, rounding up heathen. I thought I might well see him, so I told the boy to bring him along."

Mr. MacScrew paused effectively.

"I needn't describe him. You've just seen him for yourselves." (How relieved Archie Garnett would have been to hear this.) "Of course he was very tanned. By the way, he's lost some of his sunburn in this infernal climate. We shook hands, and he said that he'd brought me the MS. of a novel. Imagine the sort of novel a bishop would write!"

"*Jessica's First Prayer?*" suggested Mr. Knox.

"*The Cannibal's Conversion?*" supplied Mr. Bremner.

"Exactly. Of course that was the sort of stuff I expected. Milk-and-water, namby-pamby, Sunday-school prize style. He'd published theology. Ugh!" Mr. MacScrew shuddered. "I wasn't effusive. 'What's it about?' I asked.

"'Oh, just a—a novel,' he said. 'I wrote most of it when I was by myself in the evenings. It's pretty lonely, you know, in Wurrumpoopa, and a bit eerie, with swamps and head-hunters and deadly snakes knocking round, and it kept me from thinking too much about them. I've no idea if it's any good.'"

"And did you look at it?" eagerly demanded Mr. Knox.

"You bet I did. Opened the parcel then and there. He'd had it typed." A pregnant pause ensued. "Knox, Bremner, the first chapter, the first page, the first paragraph was enough."

Mr. Knox grinned. "You felt you'd spotted a winner, eh?"

"Spotted a winner? The stuff was IT. My difficulty was not to be too enthusiastic." Mr. MacScrew chuckled. "I told the Bishop that he'd better leave it, and if my readers thought well of it (that was Beatson and myself, but no necessity to tell him this) I'd communicate with our London office. And I did," concluded Mr. MacScrew emphatically.

"By Jove! yes. Your cable wasn't cheap, MacScrew."

"Worth it," solemnly averred the Melbourne business manager. He resumed his tale. "I kept him waiting six weeks and two days, and then wrote to him to come and see me. Blest if he wasn't off heathen-hunting again, and the letter never reached him for three months."

"During which time you sent the MS. to us, and we fairly ate it," amended Mr. Knox. The two exchanged winks. "And I drew up the Right Reverend's contract."

"You did, Barabbas."

"That's a libel," objected Mr. Knox. He reddened indignantly. "And in any case our bishop has got a bit of his own back this morning."

The trio signed mournful agreement. Mr. MacScrew continued:

"Well, he turned up under four months, nearly black with the sun, and his finger nicely ornamented. It was then he told me the yarn of the cannibal encampment and how he came by that scar." The speaker's brows met. "It's queer the way it's vanished so completely. I'd have sworn that he'd got it for life."

Mr. Bremner asked idly: "Which finger was it?"

"The first on the right hand. Half-way down, below the knuckle. Beastly awkward having to wear a ring there, but he said that it was disagreeable celebrating with a disfigured finger, and he had to hide it as best he could."

"And you say that his voice has changed?"

"Certainly it has. In Melbourne he spoke much more slowly, rather pedantically, and in capital letters, if you know what I mean. 'I have brought you the Manuscript of a Novel. I am quite in the Dark as to its Possibilities or Value.' Like that. To-day he was much more brisk and decided."

"That's easily explained." Mr. Knox waved aside the puzzle with a laugh. "He's been living for the last few months with people who speak his own tongue. In Wurrumpoopa he was preaching and talking to natives in their different dialects, thinking in English, and translating his thoughts. See?"

They both saw.

"And you told him that we'd publish the book, and wanted to contract for further work, I suppose?" Mr. Knox continued.

"That's right. He just glanced through the agreement, didn't raise one single objection, promised me the next novel in a couple of months—he'd got it practically written, he told me—and went off."

"Oh, if only all our writers were as easy to manage!" Mr. Knox's thoughts travelled bitterly to his last interview (ending in her forcible ejection) with Miss Constance Charnelhouse, author of *Miscarriage*. Garbage and Gush had published for her from the start, and her behaviour and ingratitude towards them closely resembled the morning's conduct of the Bishop of Wurrumpoopa.

"The second MS. turned up to time and we brought it out." Mr. Bremner sighed reminiscently. "It went off like hot cakes, as everyone knows. Then you wrote, MacScrew, to say that you'd seen the Bishop, that he had a new novel on the stocks, and was coming home. Of course we expected an early call from him, bringing the MS., and instead——" He paused dramatically.

"Instead," intoned Mr. Knox bitterly, "serpents are not in it."

He has some cock-and-bull story about a nervous breakdown, admits that he threw the novel into the sea, where it is irreparably lost, robs us out of face, you may say, and we shan't get a line from his pen for a whole year."

"It's iniquitous," lamented Mr. Bremner. Mr. MacScrew concurred.

"Was he quite himself when he called on you before sailing?"

"Absolutely. Looking forward to his furlough in a holy sort of way. He mentioned having run across a cousin in Sydney whom he hadn't met for years, and they were to travel in the same ship. I suppose that's the chap who was murdered. Enough to give the Bishop a nervous breakdown."

"It didn't happen until after he got home," sneered Mr. Knox. "And nothing excuses his wantonly destroying an Aubrey Pouncebox novel." He slapped his knee. "Ha! A brain-wave. Could this cousin have stolen it?"

"Hardly likely. Besides, the police or somebody would have found it amongst his things." Mr. Bremner shook his head.

"Not if it had been sent to another publisher." Mr. Knox nodded gloomily. "I believe that's what happened. This chap—what was his name? Oh, Garnett, Archibald Garnett—pinched the MS., sent it to some firm who'll leap at it, and the Bishop can't give away his own cousin, especially as he's dead."

"But you forget"—Mr. MacScrew frowned down this Sherlock Holmes theory—"nobody except ourselves knew that the Bishop was Aubrey Pouncebox, or that he wrote novels. He published his churchy stuff under his own name, but the one stipulation which he made and stuck to in his dealings with us was that his novels were to be published under a *nom-de-plume*. He chose it himself."

"Queer pseudonym. Wonder what made him hit on it."

"Oh, it was not long after that rumpus at the Residency in New Guinea. The Governor-General—Lord Farthingale—was retiring, and all his presentation stuff and Lady Farthingale's jewels were stolen and never recovered. One item was a gilt pouncebox, an heirloom, which some queen had given to an ancestress of Lady F.'s. That suggested the idea to the Bishop, he told me, and Aubrey is his second name—Gilbert Aubrey Gifford."

"Perhaps he pinched the pouncebox as well as the idea," propounded Mr. Knox bitterly. "I wouldn't put it past him after the way he diddled us all this morning." He laughed. "There's an idea for a detective novel, one of you: *The Burglar-Bishop*."

CHAPTER XIII

ARCHIE GARNETT, *alias* the Bishop of Wurrumpoopa, *alias* Aubrey Pouncebox, stood in the street and nursed his perplexities. A consultation with his watch showed him that it was past one o'clock, and his internal mechanism was accessory to the fact. He sought an inconspicuous restaurant and ordered a modest lunch.

Over pea soup he surveyed his position. He had "wangled" a substantial cheque and a year's grace out of Messrs. Garbage and Gush. That infernal business manager from Melbourne arriving so inopportunistically had been a trifle awkward, but in the long run proved a fortuitous circumstance. He was provided with a genuine Aubrey Pouncebox plot, and had twelve months in which to transfer the same into a full-length novel. Perhaps before twelve months had elapsed the murderer of Gilbert might have been discovered and he could return to his own identity. Garbage and Gush would probably make themselves very disagreeable on learning that Aubrey Pouncebox was dead and would write nothing else for them or for anybody, but the clamour of publishers cannot penetrate beyond the grave. Archie felt a sudden blind anger against the wielder of the weapon which had cut short Gilbert's brilliant career. Not only was a great missionary bishop no more, but Aubrey Pouncebox had written his last novel, unless——

An idea, daring, dangerous, but nevertheless intensely tempting, crept into Archie's mind. He let his soup grow cold whilst the thing whispered insinuatingly into his ear.

Were there not such people as ghosts? He did not mean that Gilbert's spirit walked. Perish the thought! But in literary circles authors, even great authors, employed someone else to do the drudgery, and themselves pocketed cheques and credit. If only he could find a ready writer, one who would be willing, for a consideration, to write up this Aubrey Pouncebox plot.

Peggy? She was an excellent scribe, a good correspondent, the dearest girl on earth, but literary composition was not her forte. Hugh Singleton hated the weekly toil of two sermons, and besides, would object to the deceit which the scheme involved. No; it must be an outsider, one to whom the secret of Aubrey Pouncebox's identity with the Bishop of Wurrumpoopa could be confided, and who would believe it and keep it. To find such a *rara avis* was like looking for roses in mid-winter or an honest man in a thieves' den.

Enlightenment came to him through a commonplace source. At the table next to his sat a pretty young mother and a little girl of three or four. The child was looking over a book of coloured pictures representing birds and animals. "What's that one, Mummy?" she demanded loudly.

"Hush, darling. That's a seal."

"What's a 'teal, Mummy?"

"They live in the water. There are some at the Zoo."

"Want to go to the Zoo and see 'teals."

"You shall some day. Perhaps Daddy'd take you on your birthday."

Stephen Teal! The child's stumbling pronunciation had brought back a figure out of the past to Archie. (It was his own past this time, not Gilbert's.) He recalled a brilliant, idle, unstable creature who had drifted to his sheep-run for a couple of months in a wandering, hectic career. The said Teal (Archie shrewdly surmised that the name was not his own) had been expelled from college as the result of a drunken "rag", which culminated in a drowning accident and a subsequent inquest. Sent into the wilderness by his outraged family, he had dabbled in journalism, written a play, a novel, and some volumes of verse, taken more and more to drink, until finally, as kill or cure, he was shipped off to Australia, to sink or swim. Archie had endeavoured to make him pull up, to cease to spend his dole from home on strong waters, and had earned his gratitude and liking. Where was this wandering literary star to be found now?

Not long before his departure from Wallaby Run, without the formality of bidding his host good-bye, Teal had learned of his father's death and announced his intention of returning home. He had given his friend an address in London and soon afterwards vanished. Several mementoes of his visit vanished too, presumably to pay for his passage to England. Archie did not grudge their loss now, if only it meant that Teal might be in London, available, pliable. He searched his memory feverishly for that address. Some crescent or terrace. Ah! he had it. Shandon Crescent, No. 24.

He finished his lunch, paid his bill, exchanged shy smiles with the little girl whose chatter had unconsciously put him on this promising track, and left the restaurant.

A short journey by Tube, an interminable one by bus, and he found himself in Shandon Crescent. It was a long, sad, grey street of houses, respectable, shabby-genteel, drab, in many instances bearing a card labelled "Apartments" in the lower window. He strolled along, scrutinizing the numbers. Here was twenty-four.

The bell, which hung slackly and wanted cleaning, wobbled in his hand. He rang tentatively. After an interval a stout woman appeared, wafted forward, so to speak, on a breeze of onions and beefsteak. She looked doubtfully at the large ecclesiastic who confronted her. It wasn't likely that a bishop required lodgings.

"Is—er—that is, does Mr. Stephen Teal live here?" the Bishop inquired nervously.

The answer nearly made his gaitered legs dance with joy.

"Oh, yes. 'E's 'ere. In bed. Want to see 'im?"

"If I may, please." His heart sank at that "in bed", but the great thing was to have found Teal.

The woman moved aside by way of invitation to enter.

Next to the hall-door was a bow-window, its rain-streaked glass nearly obscured in grimy curtains of Nottingham lace. As the Bishop stood on the steps he glanced up and saw a hand endeavouring

to part the curtains. He had a momentary glimpse of a woman's face before another hand drew the curtains determinedly together, and the face vanished. When he entered the house he heard a scurry of feet across the floor of the room with the bow-window, followed by a cry of anger or protest. Two voices rose.

"I tell you I will see him, you horrid thing. Let me go!"

"Now, just sit down and don't be troublesome. You're not going out of this room."

The Bishop smiled. Some child, he supposed, with a fleeting thought of gratitude towards the little one in the restaurant whose chatter had sent him here. No doubt she had wanted to run out for a closer look at the man with the funny legs. This was the description which Gilbert's gaiters had earned for his cousin from all children on board the *Kangaroo*. As he followed the landlady up steep, clean stairs, covered with a shabby carpet, he chanced to look round at the first turn. A woman in the dress of a hospital nurse had emerged from the ground-floor room and was gazing at him. When he naturally made no sign she went back, shutting the door.

"Is somebody ill?" he asked pleasantly.

"Well, not what you'd call ill exactly, but she needs looking after." The landlady's tone was guarded.

The carpet ended with the second flight of stairs and was succeeded on the third by worn and commonplace oilcloth. The landlady stopped before a door, one of three along a narrow landing. She knocked, and a voice within said something inaudible. The Bishop interpreted it as permission to enter, and followed her into a room the combined untidiness and frowsy condition of which caused his nose to wrinkle.

It was a bed-sitting-room, as evidenced by the bed, containing a young man prone under a sliding-scale of disorderly blankets, topped by an unclean quilt. The window was open, but the rest of the furniture, unmatching, broken-legged, dust-laden, proved that this apartment was the Cinderella of the house, the poor relation amongst the better-kept rooms downstairs. Like all nice women, Mrs. Fosdick had a weakness for a handsome face, so when her lodger subsided into bed for days with bottles of brandy, paid no rent for weeks, and kept her shaking in her disreputable shoes lest he should burn down the place or murder the occupants in the throes of D.T.'s, she had not the heart to give him his marching orders. Of course he realized this and traded shamelessly on it.

His reception of the Bishop was at least unusual.

"Go away!" he screamed. He struggled up in bed and covered his eyes. "Go away! Ghosts have no business to be walking about in broad daylight."

The Bishop, very naturally, objected to being mistaken for a ghost.

"Then what are you?" wailed Mr. Stephen Teal. Cautiously he unlatched one eye. "If it isn't your ghost, Garnett, may I never touch brandy again!"

Garnett!

"This is worse than blue pigs or crimson spiders," yelled Mr. Teal. He hurled a pillow at his visitor, which fortunately missed its aim. "I know you're murdered, Garnett, dead and buried, and here you march in in the daytime and stand glaring at me. Please go away. Can't you rest? What do you want to come haunting me for? I may have taken your watch and a few other things, but I didn't have anything to do with your murder."

The landlady stepped forward. "This isn't a ghost, sir. It's a clergyman to see you—a bishop."

"That's worse than a ghost." Mr. Teal scowled at her. "Why did you bring a parson in here, you old fool? I'm not going to die."

"Nonsense!" The visitor came nearer. "I'm no ghost, and I'm not"—he choked over the lie, as he always did—"Archie Garnett. I'm his cousin, the Bishop of Wurrumpoopo."

"Oh, Lord!" responded Mr. Teal faintly.

"Archie—er—spoke of you, and gave me this address. I came to see if there was anything I could do for you."

"Very kind, I'm sure."

"Well, is there?"

"I think a loan wouldn't come amiss. I haven't paid Mrs. Fosdick there for ages. Have I, Mrs. Fosdick?" He lolled back, dishevelled, unshaven, despicable, but the Bishop felt the old fascination, the old unwilling admiration creep over him.

Stephen Teal possessed a profile which, had he not destroyed his nerve through drink, ought to have made his fortune on the films. His eyes were enormous, dark, languorous, and fringed by lashes of an absurd length and silkiness. His faultlessly-cut mouth pouted over white and even teeth. His skin had not lost its freshness, nor his blue-black hair its gloss. He was a type which every woman wanted to pet and most to marry, and every man to kick. Archie knew him to be as unscrupulous as he was handsome, and as shameless as he was sly, but he might be invaluable at this crisis.

"Trot away, old dear," he advised Mrs. Fosdick.

She shook up his untidy pillows. He leaned his beautiful head against her and ogled the Bishop. They would have made an effective "close-up" thus. Archie Garnett remembered his former visitation from Teal. Drink, unabashed borrowing, a partially-scotched scandal about the pretty wife of one of his "hands", a hurried departure, followed by the discovery of several articles missing, none of which had actually been traced to Teal, but—

"I'm living at Broadcaster. Would you care to come and pay me a visit?" he suggested. Better to net his bird before unbosoming himself of the Aubrey Pouncebox complication.

"Thanks awfully." Mr. Teal did not appear enthusiastic. "It wouldn't be all prayer-meetings and Prohibition, would it?"

"Certainly not. I'm not in the least strict in my views." In addition to his marked abstinence from public worship the Bishop had already been summed up by Broadcaster as no teetotaller. "I'm suffering from a nervous breakdown, which obliges me to take things

quietly. I thought that perhaps we might do a little literary work together?"

"I'm your man," cheerily assented Mr. Teal.

Fervently the Bishop hoped that he was.

They parted, having arranged to catch the 4.10 train from St. Pancras. The Bishop would settle with Mr. Teal's landlady, and stipulated that his young friend was to bring enough luggage for a stay of some weeks, and to arrive at the station sober. Mr. Teal's pathetic plea for a small loan was sternly refused. "My dear fellow, I've lived in a hot climate, and I know the temptations. You'd never get past the door of the first pub."

Leaving Mr. Teal languidly packing, the Bishop betook himself to the nearest bank. Here he recklessly cashed Garbage and Gush's cheque, sealed up the bulk in a large envelope, and, armed with sufficient for necessities, returned to Shandon Crescent. Mrs. Fosdick interviewed him in her shabby private den in the basement.

"I'm sure it's very good of you, sir." She made out a receipt for Mr. Teal's not inconsiderable bill. "And he's going to stay with you, I understand, but wants me to keep his room for him, and some of his things."

"Oh, that'll be all right, Mrs. Fosdick. Yes, I—I take an interest in him through a—a deceased relative who knew him abroad, and I thought a quiet life might suit him for a bit."

"Well, sir, I've known his people all my life, me and my mother before me bein' in service in the family until both of us left to be married. Not at the same time, o' course." The Bishop smothered a smile. "Which Teal ain't his name, but it's best to stick to it. I'm soft where the lad's concerned, and glad to do what I can for him, but it's only fair to warn you that as long as there's a brandy-bottle or a petticoat anywhere about it's next door to impossible to keep him out of mischief."

The Bishop's heart sank. What might not result from the introduction of this intemperate Don Juan into Broadcaster? Would it be safe to reveal his difficulties as Aubrey Pouncebox? Could Teal be trusted to keep so important a secret? Yet if he did not tell him, how or where was he to obtain an urgently-needed literary ghost? And what if Teal stumbled on the darker deception, the identity of the murdered man buried as Archie Garnett? It had been a rude shock when he heard that cry of "Garnett!" occasioned by the distorted, drink-ridden vision, as Teal had imagined, of a dead man's wraith. To be actually mistaken for himself! He must play the Bishop for all he was worth.

He became aware that Mrs. Fosdick was speaking.

"If you can keep him away from the drink, sir, it makes all the difference. He's clever, and he can write beautiful when he's sober and chooses to work." She lowered her voice. "Speaking o' drink, there's another reason why I'm just as glad to have him out of my house at present. That party on the ground-floor, she's a deal too fond of a drop, and for all the nurse's watching her so strict I've my

suspicious that Mr. Teal's been in the way of supplying her more than once."

A look of disgust crossed the Bishop's face.

"I saw a nurse at the door of the room. Is she in charge?"

"Yes, sir. They come here about two months ago, the nurse and her. Oh, I've no complaints. Plenty of money, seemingly, and my account paid regular, with no fuss about extras, but if I'd known it was as bad a case as it seems I'd have said no. 'Tisn't nice in a respectable 'ouse."

He nodded agreement. "Your other lodgers don't like it?"

"There's only Mr. Teal, sir, and a married couple on the drawing-room floor, both out all day. Nobody's made any objections so far. But it's queer." She repeated the last words with emphasis. "*Queer*. She's not a lady—anybody can see that—and never has no letters nor visitors. I don't like asking the nurse any questions"—she drew herself up—"particularly when I've no call to complain about anything definite. 'Twould be different if the bills wasn't paid, but all the same it's funny. Why, I don't even know if she's a widow."

The Bishop let Mrs. Fosdick chatter and then said good-bye, kindly forbidding her to mount the long flight of stone stairs from the basement to the hall. As he was crossing this on his way to the door the nurse whom he had seen looking out of the ground-floor room emerged hurriedly from it. She came up to him and spoke in lowered tones.

"Surely you are coming in to see my patient, my lord? She saw you going away and coming back again, and she's been very much upset."

He stood wholly perplexed. Then a horrible idea took possession of him. The lady had evidently watched a clergyman entering the house, had expressed a desire for his spiritual ministrations, and how could he explain that he was a bogus bishop? "I—I have to catch a train," he stammered.

"She'll be dreadfully disappointed, my lord," the nurse remonstrated. She looked severe and disapproving. "And I'd like a little talk with you myself. Oh, it's not the money. There's plenty at the Bank, but there are some things you ought to know. I couldn't write, as I hadn't your address."

The Bishop, following Biblical precedent, opened the door and fled. "I'll write," he called back frantically.

He walked to the nearest taxi-stand, his brain in a whirl. Who was this mysterious person? "Not a lady," Mrs. Fosdick had declared with emphasis. Yet she possessed money, a trained nurse, and evidently expected that his visit to the house was solely to her. Had he been mistaken for Gilbert? But what connection had Gilbert with a woman who drank and lived in second-rate lodgings? He was unmarried, and one would as soon associate St. Paul with a mistress as the late Bishop of Wurrumpoopa. Archie began to be sorry that he had not seen her.

Mr. Teal, booted and spurred, was standing by his suitcases in the hall, awaiting a taxi. The door of the dining-room opened a sly inch or two. He moved nearer to it. Descending the stairs a few minutes earlier he had seen the nurse go down to the basement in answer to an urgent call from Mrs. Fosdick. Her patient was alone, then.

She pushed the door open wider, beckoning to him. He went over hurriedly, and she drew him inside the room. It was large and comfortably-furnished, with a fire, flowers, and light literature lying about. The occupant, who was not a lady, might have been anything between twenty-five and forty. She had the remains of prettiness, but her make-up, her dress, her whole appearance suggested a veneer of gentility which, struggling against innate bad taste, ill disguised her real commonness. Her complexion betrayed her failing. Her voice sounded peevish and unrefined.

"Nurse says you're going away." She stared at him resentfully.

"Only for a bit. To pay a visit in the country." He smiled and soothed her.

"Well, I shall miss you horribly, and I can't get on without *it*. Nurse is stricter than ever, and I can only get the stuff through you." She wept fretfully.

"You're better without brandy. I shouldn't have got it for you." Unstable as water, he felt a pang of conscience at the realization of how he had driven this weak thing a few steps further along the dark and slippery road which she was travelling.

She said nothing for a moment. Apparently her thoughts had strayed to another subject. Suddenly she burst out, speaking with childish petulance:

"You won't even tell me where you're going. It's mean."

"Oh, there's no mystery." He spoke the truth, for Archie had not enjoined secrecy upon him. "I'm off to a place called Broadcaster, to stay with the Bishop of Wurrumpoopa."

Her breath came fast. "T—I watched him going away. What's the name of the house you're going to?"

"Rose Cottage. Good Lord! I hear Nurse." He slipped from the room, and was exceedingly busy with the fastenings of one of his suitcases when Nurse Woods emerged from the basement.

She bade him a cold farewell. Nurse Woods did not like Mr. Stephen Teal.

The Bishop awaited his guest by the bookstall at St. Pancras. A first-class compartment dawned upon him as an expensive but urgent necessity. Confound the fellow! What business had he to be so good-looking? Groups of giggling school-girls followed him, worshipping him with their clear eyes. Elderly women, who should have had more sense, turned to stare at him. Middle-aged ones gazed rapturously. The Bishop bustled his embarrassing companion into the train and drew down the blinds with an irritable jerk.

Stephen Teal sat very silent during the journey. Once or twice

the Bishop, glancing up, caught the other's intent gaze. Of what was he thinking? The roar and rattle of travel made conversation difficult, and he took good care to sit as much away from the lights of the compartment as he could. If he had been able to read his visitor's thoughts he would have seriously meditated throwing him out of the train as it passed through the long tunnel between Clovebury and Thorpe.

He said he was suffering from a nervous breakdown. I suppose that would affect a chap's memory. Yet it's queer—deuced queer—that he should have breezed in like this to-day, introduced himself as Garnett's cousin, as though he and I were perfect strangers, and he only wanted to do me a good turn for Garnett's sake. Surely he can't have forgotten that I spent two months with him—and infernally long months they were too—at the Bishop's palace in Wurrumpoopo? He swallowed the yarn that I brought an introduction from Garnett, whom he hadn't seen for years, and apparently Garnett (rest his soul, he's dead) never told the Bishop that I left his hospitable roof under fairly dubious circumstances.

Wonder whether I'll find out anything about Garnett's murder when I'm actually on the spot. I've always rather fancied myself as an amateur detective.

How extraordinarily like Garnett his cousin is!

CHAPTER XIV

THE INTRODUCTION OF Stephen Teal into Broadcaster was an immediate and unqualified success with everybody except one person.

The Bishop's old housekeeper, a fixture taken over with Rose Cottage, lost her heart to him immediately. Shop-people succumbed before his seductive smile. The modernist Mr. Mortimer, the ritualistic Mr. Sievewright (Father Ignatius Xavier), the baptistical Mr. Salter, the two Roman Catholic priests all fell beneath his spell. Hugh and Ethel Singleton were no wiser than the rest. The first Sunday after his arrival Mr. Teal attended St. Cleopas and read the Lessons in a cultured Cambridge voice, his flawless profile outlined against the dusk of the memorial tablet to old Mr. Garnett on the wall behind. At Evensong that night the church was crowded, particularly with young women. The following day Mr. Teal accompanied Ethel to the Mothers' Meeting and read aloud from the Bishop of Wurrumpoopo's *Duty and Discipline*. It was a little above the heads of the audience, but the reader looked so handsome that his listeners were

too occupied in gazing open-mouthed at him to heed what he was saying.

The only individual in Broadcaster who refused to bow down before his fascinations was Peggy Fenchurch.

"Where did you get hold of him?" she asked the Bishop suspiciously. Peggy was not too pleased with her lover. Without a word to her he had disappeared for a whole day, leaving her no means of communicating with him had the necessity for such action arisen. He had crowned his misdeeds by reappearing late in the evening, accompanied by a strange young man who looked as though he had come, or ought to have come, straight from a film producer's studio. She frowned down the said young man's ingratiating ogle, and whilst he was telling Hugh and Ethel of the many temptations in a journalist's life, of his struggles to keep straight, his broken health, and the Bishop's kindness in carrying him away from heartless London for a brief rest, Peggy conveyed the said bishop firmly into the dining-room.

"Archie," she hissed, "who is this mountebank?"

The Bishop looked acutely unhappy. "I knew him abroad."

Peggy glanced quickly at him. "Did he know you as yourself or as Gilbert?"

"As myself." He met her apprehensive eyes and tried to laugh. "It's all right. He thought at first that I was A. G., and then his ghost, but now I'm convinced that he thinks I'm the Bishop of Wurrumpoopaa."

Peggy did not feel satisfied. "But what's he doing here?"

"Paying me a visit."

"I know, but why? It seems horribly dangerous. You've got to be so careful, and if he knew you in Australia—— How long ago?"

Archie calculated. "About nine months."

Peggy checked an exclamation. "So recently as that? Archie! He's bound to find out."

"Not he. Nobody else has spotted me. Besides, it isn't as if he'd met Gilbert—the real Gilbert."

"No, but, Archie, you forget. People here hadn't seen Gilbert for fifteen years, nor you—the real you—for nine. You were both little more than boys when you went away, and at an age to change. It was comparatively easy to deceive Broadcaster. But this man—a man who saw you less than a year ago——"

"I ran across a chap in town yesterday who'd met Gilbert in Melbourne only two months ago. He swallowed me all right."

Peggy gasped. "Archie, that's just what we were afraid of. You're sure that he suspected nothing?"

"Nothing that mattered. Only there was one queer thing." He frowned a little. "You remember the ring that I told you Gilbert insisted on my wearing?"

"The one we hunted all over the church for? Yes."

"This fellow asked me what had become of it. It seems that Gilbert wore it to hide a scar. He told the chap a blood-and-thunder

year about getting his finger bitten by a snake when he rescued from some cannibals. "Now, I don't remember any such."

"Did Gilbert wear the ring every time you saw him?"

"Certainly he did. I noticed it when we lost Charlie's heads because he wasn't a bit, and I suppose I'd slipped his hand on the thing. He had it on all the way, even though he was supposed to be me, a thick gold ring with a diamond stone that looked like a pebble of some sort. When we were in the train coming back he took it off and said I was to wear it."

Peggy asked sharply: "Did you see his finger just then?"

"No. He pulled his glove on again too quickly, but"—Archie looked away—"I remember his hands—after he was dead. Hugh had crossed them over his breast, poor chap, and there wasn't a sign of a sign of any kind. God forgive me if I'm wronging a dead man, but—"

"Do you think Gilbert made up the whole story?"

"It sounds like it, only sorry in that case he'd have picked on a more convenient finger? Your right-hand forefinger is always in use, or in the way of getting knocked if it's hurt. And where did that ring go to? It can't have walked."

"You might have lost it on the way to church."

"No, for I kept my glove on, and I remember thinking as we went into the church what a comformably awkward thing it would be if the ring flew off when I was in the middle of the sermon. That's evidently what happened."

"I forgot when you missed it."

"At supper. There was such confusion with the murder and my being so mad to get back and see you, darling, that I only realized that it was gone when Hugh had been called away to speak to somebody, and Ethel asked me to cut her some more cold beef." He shrugged his shoulders. "Then you came with me, like a brick, and we hunted everywhere, but it was no good."

"Could you have dropped it in the street, hurrying?"

"I don't think so. It wasn't loose, either. And that boy—Zackery Tann—hadn't taken it, for I searched his pockets."

"Well, it's all very mysterious and worrime," Peggy pouted. "We must just hope that it'll be cleared up one day—and Gilbert's murder. I don't like to think of him making up stories to show himself off as a hero. He was always too truthful in the old days. We used to call him George Washington."

The Bishop sighed. The tangle showed no signs of unravelling.

"And you haven't told me yet why you've saddled yourself with a creature who looks like a combination of Lord Byron and a film star," Peggy reminded him.

"Oh, Stephen Teal? He—he's a journalist of sorts, and is going to help me with a book."

"A book?"

"Yes." A brilliant idea occurred to him. "Fact is, Gilbert's publishers are bothering for another."

"Another like *What Thank Have Ye?* and *The Narrow Way?* But you can't write a theological book. You don't know enough about it."

Archie endeavoured to look dignified and unconcerned.

"Gilbert's books are simply his sermons dished-up. There are sure to be plenty of old ones amongst his things, and this chap is going to put them into shape for me."

Peggy stayed dissatisfied. "You ought to have told the publishers that you were suffering from a nervous breakdown and unable to write."

"So I did. Unluckily Gilbert seems to have signed a beastly contract undertaking to give them another book within a certain time. I remembered Teal's address, hunted him up, brought him down here. It'll be all right, Peggy. I can get rid of him as soon as the book's finished, and he'll be none the wiser."

"I don't like him." Peggy's tone was still obstinate. "I don't trust him. Really, Archie, to be done with all this worry, I often feel inclined to say that I murdered you, to get your money!"

On second thoughts the Bishop decided that it would be too dangerous to confide the Aubrey Pouncebox secret to his new collaborator. Why should he not simply tell him that he had the plot of a novel, but not the ability to write the same, and would Teal care to undertake the task? The question of publication and division of profits could be happily shelved to a distant epoch, or, should the author prove restive, a slice of Garbage and Gush's welcome cheque might be handed to him as an earnest of favours to come. The Bishop resolved to broach the subject without delay.

Mr. Teal, prone on an old-fashioned sofa, his perfect profile outlined against the effective background of a jade-green cushion, listened politely. Of course the Bishop must have had a lot of out-of-the-way experiences, and no doubt a certain section of the public might enjoy these in the form of a novel, but why write a whole romance round somebody else's plot? Why not a book of travels and adventures? "*Wanderings in Wurrumpoopa*. There's a good title for you."

"My—er—theological books cover somewhat of that ground," objected the Bishop. He had never been in Wurrumpoopa, and lived in dread of encountering somebody who had. "I—I prefer to try a novel. Shall I show you the plot?"

Mr. Teal acquiesced languidly. His eyes strayed to the clock as the Bishop hunted in an old bureau. A quarter past eight. Pubs shut at ten, and it was a good quarter of an hour's walk to the nearest. What sort of stuff would this "plot" be likely to be? Would a discussion of it keep him up late? If it were perfect piffle—as was more than likely—he supposed that he should have to invent something in its stead. He was not going to offend the Bishop, lose this comfortable billet and all the delightful possibilities which he saw looming ahead, by discouraging the episcopal idea of writing a novel. No, sir!

"Here you are, Teal." The Bishop brought him a folded paper. Mr. Teal sat up gracefully and adjusted a monocle. His languid attention was instantly caught and focussed. By Jove! what a story this would make! If the craftsmanship equalled the theme, here was a best-seller and no mistake. His opinion of the Bishop's abilities and intellect rose by leaps and bounds. What a slice of luck to be associated with this potential gold-mine!

"Do you—er—think it's any good?" inquired the Bishop nervously.

"Any good? Why, my dear man, it's—it's IT." Mr. Teal sprang up with glowing face, looking so beautiful that it was a pity nobody but the Bishop happened to be there to see him. "Do you know whose work it reminds me of? Aubrey Pouncebox's. Perhaps you've not read his novels?"

"Oh, yes, I have," gasped the Bishop. His heart was singing. He saw this awful problem of how to stand in the shoes of Aubrey Pouncebox providentially solved. "Well, can you write it up?"

"I think so. I'll have a shot, anyway. Of course I can't guarantee the Aubrey Pouncebox style——"

"You must," snapped the Bishop. He looked so fierce that Stephen Teal shrank back. "You've got to copy his style for all you're worth, or—or there's no good your tackling the job at all."

"But why? I haven't such a bad style of my own."

"It's a bet." The Bishop gaped ceilingwards for inspiration. "I—I made one with a man on the *Kangaroo* coming home. He bet me—er—five pounds that I couldn't turn out a novel in the style of Aubrey Pouncebox, and I—I took him, so——"

"It seems a fearful lot of fag for five pounds." Mr. Teal gazed at the Bishop curiously.

"Did I say five? I meant five hundred." Floundering in deeper waters, the unfortunate bishop wished fervently that he had never attempted such a lame explanation.

"You must be rolling," murmured Mr. Teal reverentially. "What's the see of Wurrumpoopa worth? I'd some notion myself at one time of going into the Church."

"I have private means." The Bishop spoke stiffly.

The pair of conspirators looked thoughtfully at one another. The Bishop was thinking: How much does he know, or suspect, or guess? Peggy is perfectly right. I was a fool to bring him down here. Stephen Teal's reflections ran: What's his object? I don't believe a word of that bet story. A bishop betting on board ship! Hul-lo! (His eyes narrowed.) Nobody knows who Aubrey Pouncebox really is. Even his publishers mayn't be in the secret. Can he have been this fellow's cousin, Archie Garnett, the murdered chap? I declare I've hit it. He told the Bishop, or the Bishop found this plot amongst Garnett's papers, and means to work the Aubrey Pouncebox gold-mine for all he's worth. He can't write for nuts himself, so he's obliged to get someone else—me—to do it. I believe I've guessed it in one.

He looked up, his absurd eyelashes veiling the glint in his eyes.

"Have you, by any chance, a copy of either of Pouncebox's books in the house? I'll have to mug up the style, if that's really essential."

"It's vital," groaned the Bishop.

"Who is Aubrey Pouncebox?" Mr. Teal put the question with disconcerting suddenness. "Nobody seems to know."

"Perhaps a woman?" hazarded the Bishop brilliantly.

"Not likely. Too broadminded, and in places too technical. Remember that scene in *The Man with the Red Nose* where the two fellows—the husband and the cad who's run away with the wife—are trapped in the gold-mine? The detail there is first-hand knowledge, beyond any woman's ability or opportunity, to say nothing of the psychology." Mr. Teal laughed. "No; Aubrey Pouncebox is a man, and what's more, a married man."

The Bishop leaped. "Why should you say that?"

"Why? It's patent to anybody. Take Smith, the little curate in *The Smell in the Study*."

"Who married the shop-girl that his fellow-curate had got into trouble, and found her not a bit grateful and a perfect millstone round his neck all his career?" The Bishop nodded. "Well?"

"Well, that character could only have been drawn by a married man and, take it from me, a married man who's had some." Mr. Teal nodded emphatically. "Married or single, though, Aubrey Pouncebox mayn't like you poaching on his preserves, Bishop."

The Bishop, too much occupied with endeavouring to reconcile his recent recollections of his cousin Gilbert, the celibate, the best-seller, with "a married man who's had some," incautiously blurted out his private thoughts. Unconsciously he thereby confirmed Mr. Teal's own suspicions.

"He won't mind. He's dead."

"Dead!" exclaimed Mr. Teal excitedly.

Too late, the Bishop realized his error.

"I—I heard in town the other day that he was dead," he stammered. He gazed wildly about him. "At least—— No, it wasn't Aubrey Pouncebox. It was—er—er—Horace Purplepatches."

"Horace Purplepatches dead!" screamed Mr. Teal, aghast.

"I—I understood so. Is it a great loss to literature? Of course, since my—my breakdown I confuse things, and my memory isn't what it was, but I certainly seem to have heard somebody mention that Horace Purplepatches had died recently."

"It must have been very recently." Mr. Teal looked so vindictive as to appear almost plain. "Because I was dining with him on Thursday—the night before you came to see me."

"My mistake," moaned the Bishop.

"And"—Mr. Teal's lids closed as far as the size of his eyes permitted—"he told me that his new novel was appearing this autumn, and that his publishers, Sewage and Slush, you know, were very anxious to bring it out before Garbage and Gush got ahead of them with another by Aubrey Pouncebox." He leaned forward. "S. and S. tried to find out in a friendly way how soon they expected to

publish his, and what was the title, and so on. There seems to be a mystery about it, and Pouncebox's publishers gave them no information. Perhaps that accounted for your idea that Aubrey Pouncebox was dead. Did you hear it from somebody in the trade?"

"Yes, but I—I must have been mistaken." The Bishop went to a revolving bookcase and extracted *The Man with the Red Nose*. He had found a copy of it, bearing Gilbert's autograph across the fly-leaf, amongst his unfortunate cousin's possessions, and had placed it carelessly with other books in the little drawing-room.

Stephen Teal flicked over the pages. "Whose copy's this?" he asked. "Belong to the house?"

"No, it's my own. I wrote my name in it, as people are so careless about borrowed books, and I didn't want to mix up mine with the ones already here."

"I thought a bishop always signed himself by his initials and the name of his diocese. This has G. A. Gifford, not G. Wurrumpoopo."

The unfortunate Archie wondered how many more blunders he was going to commit.

"That's in—er—official documents. This book is my private property."

"Funny that I never knew that your name was Gifford." Mr. Teal laid down the volume. "*Gifford*. Ah!"

His eyes were like lamps.

A suggestion that he should take the novel upstairs and devote an hour's serious study to it met with the Bishop's immediate benediction. Under the unwinking gaze of those brilliant orbs he felt trapped, helpless, like a rabbit in the presence of a stoat. Did Teal suspect? Could he know anything? Had that infernal Horace Purplepatches, the writer of rival best-sellers, found out the secret of Aubrey Pouncebox's identity, and betrayed it? Yet in that case did it matter whether Teal knew that the Bishop of Wurrumpoopo and Aubrey Pouncebox were one and the same? What an ass he had been to blurt out that about his being dead!

Another sinister thing was Teal's questions concerning his signature. It had been a genuine autograph of the real Gilbert's. But had the name Gifford, repeated in that questing, half-sinister tone, aroused a memory, thrown unexpected light on something which had puzzled Teal?

Long after Teal had gone to his room, long after the old house-keeper had retired to hers, the Bishop paced up and down, reviewing his perplexities. The darkness of the October night had fallen early, making drawn curtains and the electric light agreeable necessities. The wind outside kept in tune with his distracted thoughts. He did not heed how time went. At length, wearied by his fruitless efforts to adjust the unsatisfactory situation, he subsided into a deep armchair and fell asleep.

He awoke, suddenly and completely. In the first startled second he imagined himself back on his lonely sheep-run. The same sense of impending danger had aroused him that he had felt the night

when a dismissed "hand" had crept into his bedroom, armed with a knife. He listened. Nothing save the wind, a low and rising moan. Ah, but what was that noise, so faint, yet so persistent, that only ears trained to the solitude of great spaces would have detected in the night's silence? Outside the French window a finger was picking stealthily at the fastenings.

The Bishop rose. For years he had carried a small revolver as a matter of course. It did not occur to him to dispose of it as an unsuitable detail in a bishop's outfit. His right hand covered it where it lay in his pocket at the same moment as his left flung aside the heavy fringed curtains.

Involuntarily he started back. A face was pressed against the panes. It was so evil, so malevolent, that it haunted his dreams for nights to come. Nothing save a thick square of transparent, colourless glass hung between him and it. But for the glass's intervention he could have touched the face. It receded, faded into the darkness. Frantically he struggled with an obstinate fastening, flung the window open, and dashed out. There was nobody there.

The garden, which sloped gently to the thick privet hedge that divided it from the space and wildness of open moor, was dark, silent, secretive. Any corner of it might conceal that sinister watcher. In addition to the late autumnal darkness fog was drifting up from the river, dimming the lights of Broadcaster, which, a quarter of a mile away, winked obscurely through the veiling atmosphere. The Bishop went back into the house, rummaged for an electric torch, and with grim determination searched every inch of his premises. The hedge yielded nothing. The small summer-house was empty. The tool-shed harboured only its accustomed articles. He stood in perplexity, the torch casting a path of brilliance across the slant of grass. He glanced up at Teal's window, dark and wide-open. Teal must be a sound sleeper. The wind blew gently, cold and fog-laden. Wisps of moisture were carried before the searcher's eyes. Far away, on elevated ground, he could see a few lights pricking the darkness. They were the windows of Broadcaster Manor, while across the moor a single yellow square showed him where Captain Campkin's cottage stood. The Bishop smiled grimly. What would that enthusiastic solver of murder riddles in real life make of his nocturnal visitant?

A gravel path, running parallel with the back of the house, went round the side and merged into the little avenue which was the approach from the gate to the front door. As the Bishop strolled towards it he heard, very faintly, the creak and swing of the gate itself. Was the Unknown going out by it, or had some perfectly harmless individual come in? Rose Cottage was rapidly becoming a rest-house for every tramp and bad character walking to or from Broadcaster. Accustomed to foot-sore sundowners arriving at his Australian home, the Bishop, with true Colonial hospitality, fed and welcomed any one of these. At the sound of rapid, stealthy footsteps he quickened his own. Suddenly he remembered that night

in the church with Peggy, the closing door, the sense of an unseen foe, of powerlessness, apprehension. . . .

As he turned the corner of the house everything seemed to happen at once. His electric torch, which required re-charging, went out, plunging the place into complete darkness. He heard a flurry of feet and wild screaming that died down into gurglings and chokings. He ran madly in the direction of the sounds, tripped over the gardening implements left there by a plausible character who had undertaken to do some weeding, and sprawled headlong. By the time that he had picked himself up and reached the scene of the brief struggle only a prostrate form remained to tell a sorry tale.

The Bishop, gingerly approaching what he gloomily anticipated to be a dead body, was stupefied to find himself gazing into the ashen countenance of his guest, Mr. Stephen Teal.

CHAPTER XV

MR. TEAL HAD retired to his room, but not to bed. Basking before a blazing fire, he glanced through the pages of *The Man with the Red Nose*. By Jove! the chap could write. If Archie Garnett really had been Aubrey Pouncebox, then the blighter who knifed him deserved hanging twice over for destroying such a genius. It was a pretty tall order to take a plot, even so good a plot as this one, and endeavour to write it up *à la* Aubrey. Still, he'd have a shot at it, await developments, and if the novel eventually appeared as by Aubrey Pouncebox, Mr. Teal would blackmail the Bishop to the end of his days.

There seemed no other explanation for the Bishop's eagerness to have the novel written in Aubrey Pouncebox's style. Yet Teal's recollections of both cousins failed to fit in with his theory of the Bishop as cheat and thief, and Archie Garnett as a best-seller. "I never saw him write a letter or open a book the whole time I was with him," mused the perplexed young man. "And the Bishop cared for nothing on earth but saving souls. It's rum."

So puzzling was the problem that Mr. Teal decided that it must inevitably keep him awake unless certain ameliorations could be speedily obtained. These were (in order of seniority) the supplying of spirituous liquors, and the society of his fellow-creatures for a brief period. The nearest inn would presumably afford both these distractions. Mr. Teal rose and reconnoitred.

The hall-door was barred and bolted, in addition to which he had no latch-key. A thin line of light under the drawing-room door

showed him that the Bishop was still up. Mr. Teal listened at the keyhole. Everything was silent. Was the right reverend rogue praying or plotting? Mr. Teal chuckled and withdrew.

He returned to his room, which was at the back of the house, opened the window, and by means of the roof of the tool-shed reached the ground without much risk to life or limb. By walking round along the grass he gained the front-gate and was soon on the high road. A postman, gliding past on a bicycle to empty the little wall letter-box a few yards further up, answered his inquiry. Oh, yes, there was an inn nearer than Broadcaster; the Goat, not far from the cross-roads. He'd just to go straight ahead, and the sign-post would tell him where they were.

Mr. Teal stepped out briskly. The road wound uphill, and was stiff walking. Soon the houses ended and he had passed the last lamp-post. The silence and solitude began to take hold of him. He was highly-strung and imaginative, his nerves frayed through drink. The dark slopes of the fields beyond the thinning hedges on one hand, the rolling sweep of moor on the other were both unbroken by any glimmer of light. The all-pervading, foggy darkness scared him. In spite of himself his thoughts persisted in going back to the murder of a few weeks previously. If a strong, athletic fellow like Archie Garnett, who must surely have put up a fight for life, had been stabbed and his body left in the very heart of a town, how much easier it would be for the unknown assassin to fall upon him, Stephen Teal, on this lonely road. Apparently there had been no motive for murdering Garnett. There was equally no motive for murdering him, but that might not prevent its happening. He halted and pondered the situation. Surely he must be almost at those infernal cross-roads, and the postman had said that the inn was very little further. To go back now, unfortified, was not to be contemplated. At the inn he might find somebody returning the same way who would bear him company. He started suddenly. Was that a footstep, or only the wind?

In front the white arms of the sign-post glimmered out of the dark. He peered up irritably at their indistinct directions. Wide-marsh, five miles, Broadcaster, three quarters of a mile, Tatton, seven miles, Thorp, fifty-two. He looked down the Tatton road and saw the dark bulk of a house with a lighted window, presumably the Goat.

Five minutes later, in the warm, fuggy atmosphere of its little bar, he felt that the walk had been well worth while. Excellent ale frothed in his glass. A chatty commercial traveller and three or four rustics accepted his invitation to keep him company. The rustics "didn't mind if they did." The commercial traveller "never refused a good offer." The barmaid and the landlord's buxom wife who had come in were both staring open-mouthed at the young man, who looked like what you saw at the pictures. Mr. Teal sipped and smiled. Life was very agreeable. In confiding to the Bishop that he had recently been dining with the great Horace Purplepatches, Mr. Teal

had entirely omitted to mention that that celebrity had kindly assisted his depleted finances. He played meditatively with a Treasury note and emptied his glass.

"Stayin' near 'ere, sir?" asked one of the rustics.

"For a time. Very interesting country, this." He beckoned to the barmaid. "Ma belle, we are perishing of thirst."

"My name ain't Mabel. It's Lilian." She lunged over with fresh drinks. "Now, you be'ave, saucy."

Mr. Teal gently squeezed and released her. The landlord's wife looked on enviously.

"Not much going on in a quiet place like this?" the Bishop's guest hazarded agreeably.

"Well, I dunno." Another rustic scratched meditatively behind his ear. "What do you say to a real, live murder?"

"At the cinema?" grinned Mr. Teal.

"Get along! In the town—in Broadcaster."

Mr. Teal, disbelieving and delighted, demanded full particulars.

"Well, it wur this way." The speaker emptied his glass. "Old Mister Garnett——"

"'Ere, George, yer tellin' it all wrong. 'Twas *young* Mr. Garnett as wur murdered."

The narrator looked deeply offended. "Maybe yer'd best tell it yer own way, Willum Dyson."

Mr. Dyson, nothing loth, plunged into a gory narrative to which Mr. Teal listened with all the hearing capacity of both flat, shapely ears. His drink subsided unheeded in his tumbler. As a journalist he had often been sent to interview garrulous, vague, rambling, semi-educated, or densely stupid people, from the depths of whose incoherent eloquence he at last succeeded in extracting one pearl of great price. It proved so in this instance.

"George wur right in a manner o' speakin'," William Dyson conceded graciously, "by beginnin' with old Mr. Garnett. You see, mister, young Garnett as got murdered, wur 'is son, but though 'e wur an only child, and 'is father powerful rich, 'e left all 'is money to Madam, as wur the second wife."

He paused for a refreshing gulp of ale.

"Young Garnett—Mr. Archie—'e cut up rough. Took 'imself off to Australy, or them furrin parts, and never so much as a postcard from 'im till a few weeks past."

The bar held its breath.

"To go back a bit, old Garnett 'ad the one son, but a nevvly lived with 'im, and them two boys was like brothers. Mr. Gilbert—Wot wur 'is surname now, George? 'Twasn't Garnett."

"Dunno," mumbled George. He held out his glass suggestively. "'Ere, young lady, I don't mind if I 'ave another the same."

"Well, it don't matter," acknowledged Mr. Dyson. "'E don't so much come into the tale, in a manner o' speakin'. Only you see, mister, them two met in Australy, where young Gilbert 'ad become a bishop, and they come back together, and the very night they

arrived in Broadcaster, while the Bishop was a-preachin' at that big red church in Shirley Street, wot does poor Mr. Archie do but go and get 'imself murdered."

"Murdered? What a shocking thing! Who did it?"

"Ah, now yer askin' something. Nobody knows. They 'ad a hinqwest on 'im, and a doctor chap said as 'ow 'e wur stabbed through the 'eart and the body left under the archway where a railway chap found it. Fair turned 'is stummick, I should say."

In order to avoid such a catastrophe amongst the present company Mr. Teal tactfully pressed for a renewal of drinks all round.

"And they never caught the murderer?" he asked.

"Not a clue even. 'E wasn't robbed, so 'twas nobody as did 'im in for money. They found a lot o' Treasury notes on 'im, and 'is watch, and 'is pockets 'adn't been searched."

Stephen Teal frowned thoughtfully. He had, of course, read about the case in the papers at the time, and had felt a genuine regret at such a melancholy and mysterious fate overtaking Archie Garnett. He was the last man whom Teal would have thought it likely that anybody would want to murder. The Bishop's alibi was unshaken. Was there someone in Broadcaster who bore a grudge against the returned prodigal? Had there been a lady in the case?

"You mentioned a stepmother. Quite elderly, I suppose?" He spoke carelessly.

The rustics winked and nudged one another. "Not 'er, mister, if you mean Madam Garnett. She might 'ave been old Garnett's daughter. They say as Mr. Archie wur fair wild at 'is father for puttin' 'er in 'is mother's place." Bucolic chuckles rumbled and echoed. "Mr. Gilbert wur 'er favourite, but 'er and Mr. Archie 'ated each other like poison. She wouldn't 'ave been 'alf glad to see 'im back again in Broadcaster, I don't think."

Mr. Teal's meditations took a fresh turn. A youngish, widowed stepmother, with a bias in favour of the nephew, not the stepson. The Bishop had never mentioned her existence. Why was he not staying with her, instead of in his own hired house, particularly if he were suffering from a nervous breakdown? Having inherited all her husband's money presumably she was well-off.

"Where does Mrs. Garnett live?" he inquired.

"The big 'ouse up on the moors, sir. Broadcaster Manor. No, she've no children of 'er own, and the money not tied up, so we'd never be surprised to 'ear of 'er bringin' 'ome a third 'usband to 'ang up 'is 'at, as the saying is."

"A third husband?"

"She wur a widow when she collared old Garnett."

The substantial presence of the landlord prevented further details of Mrs. Garnett's career. "Time, gentlemen." One by one they lumbered to their feet and lurched out, muttering awkward thanks for the stranger's hospitality. The commercial traveller was staying at the Goat. The rustics drifted off to farms and cottages in the vicinity. The last labourer parted from Mr. Teal at the cross-roads.

He turned up his coat-collar against the encroaching mist, and plunged resolutely down the dark slope descending to Rose Cottage.

At first the mellowing warmth of old ale stayed him up, added to which his brain was busy linking together what he had just heard. So the Bishop possessed a wealthy aunt-by-marriage, who had inherited her husband's money and property to the exclusion of her stepson? She had disliked him, and would not have been too pleased to see him back in Broadcaster. Was it possible that she could have had a hand in his murder? He (Teal) must look up the old files of the local newspapers which would give a fuller report of the inquest than the London ones. He cast his thoughts back to what he remembered of Archie Garnett. He had been open-handed and careless with his money. Once he had let slip that sheep-farming was a pastime, not a necessity. He had never spoken of any relatives, excepting his cousin the Bishop of Wurrumpoopa, on the strength of which information Mr. Teal had turned up at the Bishop's house some time afterwards. The visit appeared to have entirely escaped the Bishop's memory. Could he have similarly forgotten the existence of his aunt? Were they on bad terms? What made the Bishop stay on indefinitely in Broadcaster, a place which, even though it had been his old home, as declared by the garrulous William, must be disagreeably associated with the brutal and unexplained murder of a cousin with whom, according to the same source, he had lived as a brother. Who had come in for Archie Garnett's money, the proceeds of best-sellers or otherwise?

For a time these intriguing speculations kept Mr. Teal from noticing the extreme solitude of the road. At long intervals a lamp-post shed a feeble illumination which only served to make the darkness between each seem denser than before. Gradually the return journey grew lonelier and more scarifying than the going. He began to curse his folly in having come at all. It was the height of carelessness to let those men in the bar see that he carried money. What would be easier than for one of them to pretend to turn off at the cross-roads, to wait, then follow him to rob him? He might be murdered too. He halted, listening sharply. Was that a footstep, or merely the wind? Had he really heard a stealthy rustle as of someone creeping along on the far side of the hedge? His hair rose. Oh, for electric standards, firm pavements, jostling crowds! Here in this eerie solitude, where bad gas flickered and scarcely showed a pedestrian the unevenness and puddles of the path, positively anything horrible could happen.

The fields ended and the scattered houses began. Far down the road lay Broadcaster, civilization, shops. He drew a deep breath of relief as he stood once more before the gate of Rose Cottage, and halted to spell out the name on the scroll-work decorating the rusty bars.

For the first time the problem of getting in harassed him. It had been comparatively easy to leave his bedroom by means of the window

and the tool-shed, but to return via the same method meant climbing up the side of the shed and trusting that he would find the window still open. What if the Bishop should have come to inquire for his guest's comfort, or by some other means have discovered that he was not in his room?

Mr. Teal decided to risk it, and first of all to attempt to scale the tool-shed. It might be unlocked and contain a friendly ladder. The Bishop's bedroom window looked out on the front. No light showed behind it, proving that either he had not gone to his room or was safely in bed. Fervently hoping the latter, Mr. Teal manipulated the gate with a dexterity which a burglar might have envied. That faint swing and creak were surely inaudible? He had better walk on the grass to avoid the slight crunching made by footsteps along the gravel.

As he trod delicately one side of the broad strip framing the path he heard padding feet, a rustle of garments, and something hurled itself violently upon him. He kicked frantically, screamed, and fell. Hands were round his throat, soft, long hands, squeezing out life and breath. His shrieks died down into gurgling moans, and his struggles grew fainter beneath that awful, relentless pressure. Vaguely, with drumming ears, he heard somebody running, realized that the new-comer had fallen, and was swearing vociferously. Then, as by a miracle, that strangling grip relaxed, and the unknown assassin fled into the darkness. Mechanically Mr. Teal composed his limbs picturesquely—and fainted.

When he regained consciousness and saw the Bishop's face bending over him his first dazed conviction was that his host must have been his assailant. He shuddered, strove to sit up, and fell back. To his chagrin the Bishop did not display any marked degree of sympathy.

"You'd better get on your legs and try if you can walk." He made the suggestion bluntly. "I don't want our friend to return with reinforcements and do for both of us."

Mr. Teal rose, moaning. "Oh, who was it?"

"I have no idea. Somebody with a grudge against you, apparently. It is fortunate that I happened to be in the garden and came up in time to scare him off."

"Her," corrected Mr. Teal feebly.

"What?"

"I believe it was a woman. I heard a dress rustling, and the hands"—he quivered—"they were very soft, with long fingers. I'm sure it was a woman."

"But why the hell should a woman want to murder you?" The Bishop forgot that he was the Bishop of Wurrumpoopo and spoke as Archie Garnett.

"I've no idea." Mr. Teal was too distraught to notice the lapse. "They usually want to marry me." He wept weakly. "Oh, dear! I feel so giddy. Where are you taking me?"

"We're going in by the drawing-room window. The front-door

is locked and bolted, as you probably know, or you'd have gone out by it. How did you get out, may I ask?"

"By my window, and a—a shed," murmured Mr. Teal faintly.

"Exactly. I know what you went out for, so you needn't addle your brains with making up plausible excuses." The Bishop's tone changed. "My dear Teal, I'm not so stiff and strict as all that. If you wanted a drink, why on earth couldn't you have asked me for one?"

The shattered Mr. Teal made no reply. The Bishop's omniscience was overwhelming. Supported by the episcopal arm, which felt iron and muscular, he tottered round the house, starting at every shadow, and in at the French window. The Bishop had naturally not waited to switch off the electric light when he dashed out in pursuit of the watcher with the evil face. It still burned, throwing a steady, almost contemptuous illumination over a scene of the wildest disorder.

The locked drawers of the old oak bureau had been wrenched open and the contents—letters, papers, bills—scattered broadcast on the carpet. The cushions of the Chesterfield were ripped asunder and flung aside. The whole destruction, which must have been accomplished during the brief time that the Bishop was in the garden, seemed more like the senseless freak of some monkey than the deliberate acts of any sane human being. Mr. Teal collapsed feebly on the denuded sofa.

"Oh, this is too frightful," he groaned. He sat supporting his bumped, blue-black head. "Attempted murder, and now burglary! Oh, Bishop, before you brought me down here you might have warned me that you had enemies."

"But I haven't," began the Bishop. His protest stopped short. As the Bishop of Wurrumpoopo he certainly had. Gilbert had spoken of them, obviously feared them. What kind of enemies? They must be singularly powerful and alarming to be capable of scaring a man who, on his own showing, anyway, had broken up a tribe of cannibals, single-handed.

"Wonder if anything's been taken?" he mused.

His papers, collected and examined, proved that none of them were missing. He gathered together the scattered cushions, which held nothing but down. It was all intensely mysterious and exasperating. He was really too angry to feel alarmed. Had the Unknown intended to murder him and fallen by mistake upon Teal? Was there any connection between this affair and Gilbert's murder? Had there been two people in the garden, one of whom distracted his attention by attacking Teal, whilst the other ransacked the drawing-room? Could there be anything in Teal's theory about his assailant being a woman?

The said Teal now falteringly declared himself to be a little better. The Bishop rather grudgingly doled out a modicum of brandy, and suggested a retirement to bed. Neither bedroom had been disturbed, and hearty snoring from the old housekeeper's lair proclaimed that she at least had heard nothing. Mr. Teal barricaded his window

and announced his intention of doing the same to the door directly the Bishop had left the room. "You don't know who mayn't be prowling round the house," he whined. "I believe that a man and a woman are in this. Those certainly were a woman's hands, and I could swear that I heard the rustle of a skirt."

"And what else?" The Bishop grinned.

"The most appalling language," declared Mr. Teal solemnly. The Bishop turned aside to hide his embarrassment. "That proves conclusively that there were two people—a man and a woman."

CHAPTER XVI

MR. TEAL BREAKFASTED in bed and at half-past eleven crept down-stairs, clad in a quilted satin dressing-gown. His nerves were too shattered to allow him to undertake any literary work, he declared, with a wan smile. To-morrow, if he had a better night, he might perhaps make a start on the novel. The Bishop, who had breakfasted at seven-thirty, brought his electric torch into Broadcaster to be re-charged, played eighteen holes of golf with Peggy Fenchurch, and returned home, bearing a roaring appetite for lunch, looked with unconcealed contempt at his sallow-faced, lethargic visitor. What a jackass he had been to saddle himself with this lazy, intemperate, suspicious young man, who more than once had shown himself unpleasantly near to plucking the heart out of his mystery!

"I suppose you've been to the police?" hazarded Mr. Teal languidly. How enormous and energetic and overwhelming the Bishop looked. By Jove! what a likeness to his cousin, accentuated by lay clothes. Garnett had had just that trick of standing with one hand thrust into his pocket.

"No." The Bishop spoke curtly. "I don't want them messing round, poking their noses in here. They've got their hands full with my cousin's murder, or ought to have."

"That reminds me"—Mr. Teal forgot his languor and sat up—"could this burglary and assault have anything to do with that?"

"Quite possibly." The Bishop shrugged his shoulders.

"I've a theory." Mr. Teal's eyes narrowed. "I wonder whether the chap who knifed Garnett really intended to do for you. You're uncommonly like one another, you know."

The Bishop looked disagreeably startled. "Absurd! It was no secret that I was preaching at St. Cleopas that evening—at the very time, and"—he played a bold card—"allowing for a certain resemblance as near relations, no one could murder Archie by mistake for me. Besides, who'd want to murder me?"

"Well, apparently somebody did last night. I'm convinced that this woman mistook me for you in the dark." Mr. Teal was obstinate.

"But that doesn't explain the mess we found the drawing-room in." The Bishop frowned heavily. "It can't have been robbery. I've very few personal possessions, and nothing of any value."

"Had your cousin—Garnett?"

"Certainly not. Besides, robbery was emphatically not the motive in that case. His money—a large sum—and his watch were untouched."

"Well, it's all most unsafe and alarming," complained Mr. Teal. He rolled enormous, reproachful eyes at his host. "I feel quite sure that they'll have another try to get you, and next time they may succeed. I—I wish you'd let me go back to town."

"If you're afraid"—the Bishop could not quite conceal his contempt for this creature—"I'll take lodgings for you. But back to town you don't go till you've had a shot at that novel."

In the afternoon, fortified by an excellent lunch, Mr. Teal was sufficiently recovered to stroll out. The Bishop, who had become very tired of his company, saw him going in the direction of Broadcaster, and thankfully dismissed him from his mind. Directly he was out of sight of the house Mr. Teal's languor evaporated. Ten minutes afterwards, behold him seated in Broadcaster Public Library, the gift of John Garnett, Esq., eagerly looking up the account of the inquest on John Garnett's son.

With the exception of Mrs. Garnett's evidence, which he studied minutely, he learned little that was new to him. Several theories presented themselves on his quick mental horizon. Could the Bishop have murdered his cousin in the train, conveyed the body (details could be adjusted gradually) to the archway, and hastened back to St. Cleopas in time to keep his engagement to preach? Against this, there was the evidence of the porter who saw what was presumed to be Archie Garnett parting from the Bishop and leaving the station alone. Still, there must have been plenty of tall men wearing light overcoats in Broadcaster that evening. What was easier than for the porter to have seen a stranger in conversation with the Bishop, and naturally concluded that it was the man shortly afterwards found murdered?

"Asses!" inelegantly reflected Mr. Stephen Teal. "It doesn't seem to have struck one of them that nobody saw Garnett arrive in Broadcaster *alive*. He may have been murdered miles away. We've only the Bishop's word for it that they travelled together and parted at the station. The porter didn't know Garnett, and that class will say anything."

Motive? He dismissed the theory of a woman with scorn, fortified by his recollections of the Bishop in Wurrumpoopa, his celibate, austere life and comfortless house. Money? The Bishop had spoken of private means—an elastic term—but was it not possible that he needed more than his own income and the see of Wurrumpoopa afforded him? Had he discovered the Aubrey Pouncebox secret during his cousin's lifetime, killed the goose that laid the golden

eggs, and resolved, with Teal's assistance, to take his place amid the ranks of the best-sellers? Mr. Teal mixed his metaphors increasingly in the heat of his excitement.

If the Bishop had not been the murderer, who was? Teal did not believe for a moment the story of a mysterious appointment with somebody in Broadcaster. The Bishop had made that up, for motives of his own. He was presumably the last person to see his cousin alive, and whilst he himself was visible, preaching before hundreds of people, the aforesaid cousin was murdered, and his body placed under an archway. Archie Garnett had told Teal in Australia that he had not seen the Bishop for many years. The Bishop had told Teal the same of Archie Garnett. They had been on good terms, but had never corresponded. Could something have occurred during the voyage which had caused one—and that one a church dignitary—to murder the other? Or was his morning's theory right, that Garnett had been murdered by mistake for the Bishop, and that the murderer had come by stealth to repair his error?

The Devil, at all times a busy personality, found leisure that afternoon to devote himself especially to Mr. Teal. Assuredly nothing but the Devil could have guided the young man's footsteps so unerringly in the direction which he, all unwittingly, took. The Devil, more politely to be described as Fate or Chance, led him to Captain Campkin, the one person who could tell him what the newspapers had never learned.

After leaving the public library Mr. Teal strolled to inspect the archway which had been the scene of the grim discovery. He let no detail escape him. It was a bare five minutes' distance from St. Cleopas. Arriving at Broadcaster at ten minutes past six, the Bishop would have had ample time to convey his gruesome burden from the station, leave it under the archway, and be in the vestry of St. Cleopas before the half-hour struck. Ah! but he had said at the inquest that he had driven from the station straight to the church in the Broadcaster Manor carriage. The coachman could easily corroborate this statement. Mr. Teal began to think gloomily that he must look elsewhere for the murderer.

"All the same, the Bishop knows something," he reflected. "If he didn't make that up about Garnett meeting somebody in Broadcaster, he knows who it was. A woman? I wonder."

He sauntered meditatively past the archway and looked round him. The street went on, ending in slummy little cottages with a half-hearted air of the country about them. Beyond, it merged into the moor, across which a path, little better than a sheep-track, wound leisurely. Mrs. Garnett, according to the testimony of Captain Campkin, who possessed excellent eyesight, had taken it on the evening of the murder. In ignorance of this interesting fact Mr. Teal proceeded to take it now.

He had a good bump of locality and argued that walking this way must eventually bring him out near Rose Cottage. He could

see the solitary little house which was visible from the back windows of his host's present abode, and it looked comparatively near. Beyond it, on a rise, Mr. Teal discerned the chimneys and roof of a fine mansion evidently standing in its own grounds. He questioned a passer-by, who replied that this was Broadcaster Manor.

Despite his ample lunch, Mr. Teal began to feel the need of a cup of tea. The Bishop had mentioned that a retired sea-captain lived at the cottage on the moor. Seafaring folk were notoriously given to hospitality. Supposing that he strolled casually up and asked his way at the door. Experience had taught him that in similar circumstances he was invariably invited in and fed.

Propelled by the Devil, Mr. Teal walked on. His luck was extraordinarily favourable that afternoon, for as he neared Marathon Cottage (named after the first ship which Captain Campkin had commanded) he saw that meddlesome mariner in the garden. A faint tang of wood-smoke and burning leaves rose on the air. Captain Campkin had enjoyed a couple of pipes, done a little digging, and was now feeling agreeably idle. Perceiving a stranger approaching, who, on a closer view, resolved himself into an exceedingly handsome young man, Captain Campkin hailed him.

"Not much of a road this, sir. Are you making for anywhere special?"

"I'm staying at Rose Cottage. I thought I could get to it by this right-of-way. Not private property, I hope? I shouldn't like to trespass."

"Not at all. This is a public path, but it doesn't lead anywhere particular, except to Broadcaster Manor. If you want Rose Cottage I'm afraid you've taken rather a round."

Mr. Teal sighed pathetically. "Oh, dear! and I'm feeling quite done. I've been ill, and foolishly attempted too much. I wonder——"

Captain Campkin rushed to undo the gate. "You must come in and rest before you go another yard. Yes, yes, I insist. No trouble at all. We'll have a cup of tea together, and I'll see you part of your way back."

Murmuring graceful apologies for being "such a nuisance," Mr. Teal followed Captain Campkin, nothing loth. The cottage was old and quaint, full of treasures picked up in the course of an active, wandering life. The sitting-room had a low, black-beamed ceiling, lattice-windows, and inglenook fireplace, and, what appealed far more to Mr. Teal, a substantial meal set forth on a stout table.

"My sister keeps house for me," Captain Campkin explained, "but she's out. Still, I see that she's left everything ready. If you'll excuse me for a second I'll just make the tea. An old sailor's handy."

Mr. Teal, lying back in a rocking-chair, his eyes closed in the interesting pallor of his face, nodded feebly. Directly he heard his host conducting operations with a kettle in the kitchen across the passage he leaped up, all his languor vanished, and investigated the room. Comfort, but not luxury, simple tastes, everything above-

board and unconcealed, ran his verdict. The fellow seemed to be a bit of a reader. The bookcase was crammed with well-thumbed volumes, all of which were either detective stories, murder tales, or spicy accounts of crimes in real life. He was handling *Twelve Scots Trials* when the owner came back.

"Ah, I see you're looking at my library." He smiled proudly.

"I ventured to. I love books." Mr. Teal smiled also. "Yours seems a most interesting collection. Are you a connoisseur in crime, may I ask?"

Captain Campkin, a simple soul, was not very sure what a connoisseur might be, but the magic word crime set a match to the gunpowder of his pet hobby.

"There's nothing like it." He spoke emphatically. "A murder—— The motive, the detail, the—the—what's the word, now?—of the criminal——"

"Psychology?" suggested Mr. Teal.

"Exactly. Thank you. Won't you come to tea? I must show you my little collection of souvenirs of famous crimes afterwards. Do you know I actually have the key of the door of the dining-room in which Miss Milton was found murdered?"

Mr. Teal expressed suitable astonishment and congratulation.

"And the poker that James Lund battered his wife's face in with. His son gave it to me. You remember? The Bayswater murder of 1890?"

"I'm afraid that was a little before my time." Mr. Teal shook his head. "I should like to see the poker, though."

"I keep my museum locked up." Captain Campkin grinned.

"My sister can't bear the sight of the things."

"Ah, of course a lady's more sensitive feelings—— Yes, thank you, I *will* venture on plum jam. What delicious scones!"

"My sister's baking. I hope you'll look in another day when she's here." Captain Campkin regarded his guest with frank admiration. "Did I understand you to say that you were staying at Rose Cottage?"

"Yes. With the Bishop of Wurrumpoopo."

"Ay. Sound man, the Bishop."

"He's very kind," purred Mr. Teal.

Captain Campkin replenished his guest's cup a second time.

"Talking of murders"—up popped his King Charles's head—"you know that we had a shocking one in this town a few weeks ago? The Bishop's cousin."

"Yes. I knew him in Australia." Mr. Teal spoke casually.

"How intensely interesting!" Captain Campkin edged his chair an inch or two nearer to the caller's. "Intimately?"

"Oh, no. I just paid him a visit. Colonials are very hospitable, and"—a dazzling smile indicated the rapidly diminishing contents of the tea-table—"so are home people."

"Tut! tut! Have another cup? No? Well, cut that cake, then. Home-made and quite simple." He frowned meditatively. "And so

you knew Garnett? Terrible affair. Young, and wealthy, and engaged to be married——”

Mr. Teal nearly dropped the large slice of cake which he was conveying to his plate. “Archie Garnett engaged?” he gasped.

“Oh, yes. It was before he went to Australia. Broadcaster has never quite made up its mind whether the engagement was broken off or not, but it seems unlikely, as he left the lady every penny he possessed.”

Mr. Teale absent-mindedly smeared plum-jam on his cake. “Who is she?”

“Miss Fenchurch. Her brother-in-law is the vicar of St. Cleopas, and she lives with him and her sister.” Captain Campkin chuckled. “Shouldn’t think she’d be there long. An heiress gets plenty of chances of a home of her own.”

Mr. Teal almost swallowed a stone in Miss Campkin’s plum-jam. “An *heiress*?”

“To be sure. Garnett left a quantity of money. Sheep-farming must be a paying business, for his father left him nothing.”

Sheep-farming! Best-sellers, more likely. Mr. Teal sat alert and interested. So the tall, beautiful girl whom he had casually met at the vicarage when Mrs. Singleton brought him in after that confounded Mothers’ Meeting was Archie Garnett’s former fiancée and present residuary legatee. He remembered how coolly she had acknowledged his presence and the possessive manner in which she had carried off the Bishop, leaving him to talk church shop with the Singletons. Could Archie Garnett’s mysterious appointment have been with *her*?

“I suppose poor Garnett’s murder is likely to be added to the list of unsolved crimes.” He yawned slightly. “I read an account of the inquest at the time, but I don’t remember any mention of Miss Fenchurch. Did she give evidence?”

“No. They kept her out of it, fortunately. It seems that Garnett’s return was as much a surprise to her as to everyone else, and she saw and heard nothing about it till the news of his murder. Try those biscuits.”

“Must have been a pretty big shock, however well-gilded afterwards. Thanks. Uncommonly good tea you’re giving me.”

“Delighted to have your company. Shock? I daresay. She’s going about just as usual. No splash, no display.” Captain Campkin helped himself to honey. “I see her out walking with the Bishop very often.”

Mr. Teal’s pulses quickened. In addition to stealing the fruits of his cousin’s labours as Aubrey Pouncebox, was this perfidious prelate meditating enjoying his shoes and his heiress? Was he engaged to Miss Fenchurch? If engaged, why was it not given out? Too soon after the tragedy? Poppycock! People had scrapped all those obsolete ideas about respect for the dead, and a good job too. Yet to Teal’s shrewd observation neither looked happy. Was it guilty conscience? If so, whose, or, as Mr. Teal’s mental gymnastics

ungrammatically expressed it, which's? His mind worried round that mysterious appointment of Archie Garnett's on the night of his death. Could it have been with Peggy Fenchurch? Then, as her acknowledged fiancé, why should he not have gone openly to the house to see her? Ah-h!

Supposing that he was tired of her and wanted to break it off? He might easily have met somebody on the voyage, or in Australia, whom he liked better. He might have married out there since I saw him. If my theory is right, and Garnett was Aubrey Pouncebox, then he was a married man. No bachelor could have written those two books. That's it. He would have been ashamed to go to the vicarage, so he asks her to meet him somewhere, tells her that he's married, and——

And—what? What fresh turn had the changed relations of the pair given to the story? Suddenly Teal remembered a fragment of the vicar's brief evidence. Archie Garnett had not gone to the vicarage, because Mr. Singleton's sister-in-law had been there alone the whole evening and had seen nothing of him.

So she had *said*. Who was to deny or corroborate her statement? Mr. Teal now believed firmly that she had had an interview with Archie Garnett, either in the vicarage or somewhere outside, that he had angered her, and she had killed him. The archway where the dead man had been found was only a few minutes' distance from the church and vicarage. Alone, or aided, she had dragged the body there——

"And come in for the shekels." Mr. Teal licked his lips. "The Bishop knows, I bet, and she's going to marry him to make him hold his tongue."

He looked over at Captain Campkin.

"You said that Miss Fenchurch did not know that Garnett was arriving in Broadcaster that evening. Did anybody?"

Captain Campkin had pushed aside his plate and begun to smoke. "Only Mrs. Garnett."

"The stepmother? By Jove! yes. There were some questions asked at the inquest about a postcard which he'd sent her, and the Coroner rather pitched into her for not having kept it."

Captain Campkin grinned. "That postcard must have given the lady the shock of her life. I suppose you know the story of old Garnett's will. Every farthing, except a few minor legacies, to Mrs. Garnett, and neither the son nor the nephew mentioned at all."

"Oh, the nephew is the Bishop of Wurrumpoopo—my host—isn't he? Odd to ignore both. I suppose that's why the Bishop has nothing to do with his aunt."

"Young Garnett never forgave his stepmother, as everyone knows, but the Bishop used to be on excellent terms with her, long after his uncle's death. He was coming to stay at Broadcaster Manor when he returned home this time."

Mr. Teal breathed hard. "And why didn't he?"

Captain Campkin looked important and uncomfortable. "I was

one of the jury at the inquest on Garnett, and—and drew certain conclusions.”

“Of course.” Mr. Teal nodded agreement. “An expert in crime like yourself would naturally spot things that the average citizen would never see at all.”

Rosy with gratified vanity, Captain Campkin rushed upon his fate.

“The Bishop does not trust his aunt.” He spoke pompously. “He has reasons—grave reasons—for considering that she had a hand in the crime.”

Mr. Teal sat with bolting eyes. “You mean that he thinks that she put Garnett out of the way? Good heavens! Isn’t this a very serious accusation to bring against a lady?”

“I don’t make it without proof.” Captain Campkin’s reply came snappishly. “You may remember Mrs. Garnett’s evidence at the inquest. She knew that her stepson, whom all Broadcaster is aware that she treated badly over his father’s will, and had held no communication with for years, is returning home unexpectedly. That postcard told her that he would arrive with the Bishop. I maintain that there was something else written on it which upset her, and so she tore it up.” He halted. “She goes to church, and leaves it at a quarter past seven on the pretence of feeling faint. She got rid of her maid who was with her. More should have been made of that point. At the inquest she implied that she walked straight home by Acacia Road, that steep road past the houses, and her butler or somebody let her in at twenty-five minutes to eight.” He paused again.

Mr. Teal began to look bored. “Surely that exonerates her—proves a complete alibi?”

“Wait.” Captain Campkin raised a gnarled hand. “*She never came that way at all.* I myself saw her on the moor, coming along the path that you took this afternoon. It was half-past seven, and the body was found under the archway at eight o’clock. Garnett had been dead about half-an-hour.”

The warm little room was very still. A cuckoo looked out from a carved clock and called four times.

“Mrs. Garnett must have passed under the archway just about the time that the body was placed there. Either she saw it, or she——”

“Put it there herself,” supplied Mr. Teal.

“I admit that there are difficulties in proving my theory.” Captain Campkin frowned forensically. “The medical evidence appeared to establish that Garnett was killed in some house and the body carried to the archway. It was broad daylight—very strange and puzzling. Another mysterious thing is that no weapon was ever found.”

Mr. Teal, after a delicious tea, an inspection of the criminous collection which was the pride of Captain Campkin’s heart, and a cordial invitation to return speedily, bade farewell to his host and left Marathon Cottage. His afternoon had been well spent. Captain Campkin, somewhat regretting his confidences to a complete stranger, however charming and plausible, had sworn him to secrecy concerning

Mrs. Garnett's perjury, but Mr. Teal would hold his tongue precisely as long as it suited him. He thought of the hands which had clutched his throat in the garden not twenty-four hours earlier. Did they belong to the murderer of Archie Garnett, and was the murderer Mrs. Garnett or Peggy Fenchurch? If Miss Fenchurch had been his assailant, had she mistaken him for the Bishop, whom she sought to strangle and silence because he knew her guilty secret? Teal resolved to prosecute his acquaintance with Peggy without delay.

CHAPTER XVII

MRS. GARNETT HAD ONCE, with little charity but some truth, described Ethel Singleton as "a perfect sieve". If she had had the felicity of beholding her erstwhile vicar's wife (Mrs. Garnett had shaken off the dust of St. Cleopas and betaken herself and her subscriptions to St. Michael and All Angels) seated in her drawing-room, in ecstatic conversation with Mr. Stephen Teal, she would have gone further and summed her up as a fool.

Upon leaving Captain Campkin's Mr. Teal had strolled back by way of the town. At Schofields', the principal stationer's, he ordered a portable typewriter, a huge supply of varied and expensive type-writing paper, six note-books, the latest fountain pen, and a large bottle of stylo ink. After directing that these trifles should be despatched to him at Rose Cottage and the accompanying account made out to the Bishop of Wurrumpoopa, Mr. Teale dawdled gracefully in the direction of St. Cleopas' vicarage. Yes, the missus was at 'ome. Ruby, an ardent devotee and patroness of the local cinema, gazed worshipfully at the beautiful young man. She'd make an excuse to bring in some coal for the drawing-room fire and get another look at him.

Ethel found Mr. Teal altogether charming. Without saying it in so many words, he skilfully conveyed the impression that a young married woman of her tastes and attractions surely must find Broadcaster a trifle cramping. Mrs. Singleton had been perfectly satisfied with Broadcaster, her husband, her home, her even existence, until this fascinating serpent suggested anything else, when unexpectedly her point of view changed. Hugh was a dear, but woefully unenterprising. He'd never get preferment. Broadcaster was a dull, gossiping hole, and her acquaintances stodgy and stupid. She was suddenly filled with envy of Peggy's freedom, Peggy's fortune. The vicarage was shabby. . . .

"I do feel for you, dear Mrs. Singleton." Liquid brown eyes

gazed into hers. "There must be some spiritual link, some affinity between us. Do you write?"

"Oh, no." Ethel blushed.

"Ah, you may not create, save those charming human documents that I saw with you on Sunday"—Ethel blushed still more—"but you would understand and sympathize with an artist's struggles." His hand touched hers lightly. "For instance, my own case—— There! I mustn't bore you with my troubles."

The enraptured Ethel breathed a low: "Oh, do go on."

"Well, I scribble. Trifles, ephemeral verse, little nothings, yet they require scope and space." He drew a deep breath.

"Surely you have those at Rose Cottage?" Ethel looked puzzled.

"I have—I have. Don't mistake me," cried Mr. Teal eagerly. "My room is delightful. The—er—the wind on the heath blows through the open window, but"—he descended abruptly to prose—"the Bishop, although the kindest of hosts, is my—er—stumbling-block."

Ethel looked inquiring.

"I find him so large, so solid, so mundane, so of the earth earthy." He sighed. "My poor little fancies shrivel and fade in that robust presence. He is not unsympathetic. He too writes." Remembering several volumes of what he gracefully designated as "theological tripe", Mr. Teal felt safe in making this statement.

"I think my sister told me that you were doing some secretarial work for him. I suppose helping with another volume of essays." Ethel smiled encouragement.

Mr. Teal made a mental note that Miss Fenchurch either might, or might not, know of the Bishop's efforts to emulate Aubrey Pouncebox. If she knew, she had not told her sister.

"Ah, yes. A few hours' work daily. Uncongenial to my vague temperament, but I cannot accept the Bishop's hospitality and make no return." Mr. Teal checked a fluttering sigh. "I am not penniless. I have a modest income." (After his father's death the surviving members of his family paid him to keep away.) "If only I could find a quiet place, a real home, where there were children (accursed, noisy little wretches), and gentle, womanly companionship and sympathies!"

Out of Mr. Teal's vague murmurings Mrs. Singleton seized upon a brilliant idea. The ideal home which he was so pathetically drawing was surely represented by St. Cleopas' vicarage. She lost no time in saying so.

"Dear, kind friend!" Large tears suffused the brown eyes. "Ah, if I might. Such a haven! Such peace! The occasional society of your manly husband—what a gentleman! Have you ever noticed how Colonial life roughens and unrefines certain natures?—your charming sister's bright talk, and *you*—you to bring my little woes to, and the children—— Oh-h!" He gave a shuddering gasp of rapture.

Ethel, seized with qualms as to what her husband and Peggy

might say, reminded herself firmly that she was mistress of the house. Mr. Teal would be no trouble.

"My tastes are simple," he was murmuring. "Spring water, no late dinner, an early start, and above all, mental rest. Your presence will give me that." He sat lost in dreams. "May I tell the Bishop, and come to-night?"

"To-morrow would be better." I have, to tell the others, and your room must be got ready."

Ruby, entering with the coals which had been neither rung for nor required, discovered her mistress in the act of having both hands kissed by Mr. Teal. She never did! Mrs. Singleton, a married woman with two kids. If it had been Miss Peggy, now—— Where were Mr. Teal's eyes?

As if in answer to the question he raised and rolled them at Ruby. She fled, giggling. My! he was a one. But *that* good-looking. She'd tell Bert Evans. Make him real jealous. Ruby mused happily on Mr. Teal's perfections as she laid the table for supper.

For some little time past the Bishop and Peggy had formed the habit of meeting one another each afternoon by the little wall letter-box a few yards up the road from Rose Cottage. People saw them and talked, but then people would talk in any case, the Bishop grumbled. With winter creeping on apace the days were growing so short and dark that he refused to let Peggy walk the lonely road after four o'clock. The day following Mr. Teal's tea at Captain Campkin's, and his confidential talk with Ethel Singleton, the lovers kept their unspoken tryst. It was barely three o'clock, yet already dusk was beginning to close in. The wind rattled the leafless trees, and Peggy's pallor and air of dejection matched the sad hues of the landscape.

"Archie, I'm awfully worried." She paced slowly beside him up the road. "That mountebank person, Mr. Teal, called on Ethel yesterday, and she's actually arranged to have him at the vicarage as a p.g."

"Stephen Teal? Good heavens! But why?" Was the fellow such a coward that he was afraid to sleep at Rose Cottage? The Bishop had told Peggy nothing of the night alarms which had so recently happened there.

"I don't know. I don't like him." The road was deserted and she slid her arm through her lover's. "I'm certain he's doing it for some reason."

"But there's nothing that he can find out at the vicarage. In a way it's just as well to get him out of the house with me." The Bishop laughed grimly. "I live in mortal terror of making some slip that will put him on the scent. He remarked the other day how alike Gilbert and I were."

"He said he was helping you with your next book, so you won't be rid of him." Peggy's tone was melancholy. "And you know, Archie, I don't particularly want him to learn every detail about our engagement, and Mrs. Garnett, and your money—all our private

affairs, in short. Ethel's a darling, but she does tell people everything, and this man's so plausible."

The Bishop looked grave. Stephen Teal had spent the morning at the new typewriter, and by lunch-time had produced a creditable chapter in the style of Aubrey Pouncebox. Archie was too uncritical and unliterary to be able to distinguish gold from dross. Aubrey Pouncebox had possessed that intangible something which makes a book go straight to the hearts of millions, and Teal, a clever imitator, could not copy just this one thing. Not realizing the true difference between satin and shoddy, so to speak, the Bishop had been feeling at peace and reassured. Even the size of Schofields' bill had not greatly disturbed his equanimity. And now Teal, without rhyme or reason, without a word to his host, was quietly preparing to depart from Rose Cottage. But why select the vicarage as his base of operations?

Suddenly Peggy released his arm. "Archie, look. Here's Mrs. Garnett."

The mistress of Broadcaster Manor was indeed bearing down upon them. A sharp turn in the road had hitherto hid her from sight. The Bishop felt a curious sense of impending fate coming closer as he watched the tall, black-clad figure's advance. She had never worn colours after her husband's death, so had been spared the awkwardness of putting on mourning for her much-disliked stepson. Save across the room at the inquest, and at the vicarage during the reading of his will, Archie had not seen her, except in the distance, since his return. Involuntarily his hands clenched. He longed to take her by the throat, to tell her of his scorn for her lying and treachery. Was she indeed Gilbert's murderess?

When she was almost upon the pair the Bishop stepped off into the roadway, raising his hat. The gesture was the merest conventionality, a bare acknowledgment of her existence and their acquaintance. Mrs. Garnett ignored Peggy. The two had never spoken after the reading of the will. She halted, fixing the Bishop with a penetrating stare, and asked coolly:

"Well, Gilbert, and when are you coming to see your aunt?"

"Never!" His tone was savage.

"Well, well, you needn't be so fierce about it. Can't you just say yes or no? No, thank you, would be more polite." She laughed spitefully. "You sounded quite like poor Archie. He was always so vehement and excitable."

The Bishop, very pale, demanded: "Have you *no* regard for Peggy's feelings?"

"Oh, Peggy's consoling herself very agreeably." Mrs. Garnett laughed again. "Really, Gilbert, I consider that your behaviour is not at all what one would expect from a gentleman and a bishop. The whole of Broadcaster anticipates that you are going to compensate Peggy for her disappointment about Archie, but I think it's very wrong, very cruel of you to raise expectations which you can never fulfil."

He stood very still. His breath came hard. "What on earth do you mean?"

"Oh, you know perfectly well. *Perhaps you thought that I didn't know.* I have known for years. Wade told me." Her expression was alive with malice. "If you don't want Broadcaster to know, you'd better be a bit more civil to your aunt."

"I have done nothing that I am ashamed of." He threw back his head. Peggy, unconsciously copying the gesture, moved to stand beside him.

Mrs. Garnett laughed a third time. The lovers, hearing, shuddered. It was as though the leafless, barren trees, the dun-coloured, sombre moors, had taken voice.

"I don't wonder that you two meet in this clandestine way. Of course you are ashamed to go to the vicarage, Gilbert, and do your courting openly." She turned to Peggy. "I am sorry for you, Peggy," she told her cruelly. "You've already had one matrimonial disappointment, and if you think that you're going to be a bishop's wife you're only preparing for another. It is not as though you were very young either, and could afford to waste your time expecting Gilbert to propose."

Peggy smiled magnificently. "You needn't be anxious on my account, thanks, Mrs. Garnett. I always said that I'd never marry a clergyman, and a bishop would be far worse. I've seen enough of the life with Hugh and Ethel."

Mrs. Garnett appeared somewhat taken aback. "Then you're not engaged to Gilbert?" she gasped.

A queer look flitted across Peggy Fenchurch's face. "No; I am certainly not engaged to Gilbert." She spoke calmly.

Archie, meanwhile, had been studying Mrs. Garnett's expression. What secret of the real bishop's did she hold? Why did she imply that he could never marry Peggy? Crafty, unscrupulous, she had separated himself and Peggy for eight years, murdered, he firmly believed, Gilbert, under the impression that she was murdering her stepson, and now hinted at blackmail. He resolved to have no mercy—and struck.

"I think you had better be very careful." His voice sounded ominously quiet. "I shall not come to see you, or hold any communication with you, and"—he watched her thin nostrils dilate—"if you attempt to spread any stories to my discredit, it will be my duty to bring a little fact before the notice of the Coroner."

Mrs. Garnett fell back against the wall.

"What little fact?" Her breath came in hard gasps.

"Merely that you committed wilful perjury at the inquest on my cousin. You implied, if you did not actually say, that you walked home from church on the evening of the murder by this road. You did not. You came by way of the archway and the moor."

Mrs. Garnett recovered and stood upright. "How very interesting! Prove it," she sneered.

"I can, and I will if necessary. I have a witness. You were seen."

He felt a spasm of pity as she almost collapsed, covering her eyes. Peggy moved impulsively to her side, but Mrs. Garnett thrust her away. Her face, when she raised it, was sickly, ashen. "I—I had nothing to do with the murder. The body wasn't there when I passed the archway," she panted.

"Ah, so you admit that you did pass it?" Stern as a judge, he towered above her.

Her look grew sullen. "You say that I did, and can prove it. Who saw me?"

"That I shall not tell you."

Her brow was furrowed. Peggy caught a murmured: "If I'd had any idea I'd have bribed the wretch to say nothing." They waited—the two women and the man—in the windy road, whilst the twilight of the short winter day deepened. At last Mrs. Garnett moved stiffly.

"Hold your tongue, and I shall hold mine." She gave the Bishop a fierce, measuring glance, nodded briefly to Peggy, and walked on. Her footsteps, rustling the fallen leaves strewn the path, died away.

"Hell!" ejaculated the Bishop.

"Archie darling, you were splendid." Peggy's eyes shone. "But what could she have meant? About Gilbert, I mean."

"Heaven knows. If anybody sported the white flower of a blameless life it was old Gilbert. And what can *Wade* have told her about him?"

Both were silent for a few minutes.

"I think"—Peggy's voice shook nervously—"it would be a good thing if you went away."

"Went away from Broadcaster? But where—and why?"

"Because I don't believe you're safe here. You may let something slip, living in a place where you and Gilbert were both known, and where everybody remembers my engagement." She added earnestly: "You'd feel easier and not so much on your guard with strangers. Do go, Archie."

"But, dear, how long must this ridiculous farce continue?"

"Till we find the murderer, I suppose. Did you notice Mrs. Garnett's face just now? I'm more certain than ever that she did it."

The Bishop, turning over puzzles in his own mind, resolved to tell Peggy of the mysterious nocturnal happenings at Rose Cottage. Her opinion might throw some light on the darkness of that recent night's doings. She listened, wide-eyed, to his account. Mr. Teal's danger and escape met with scant sympathy, but at the idea of her lover's peril she turned and clung to him passionately.

"Archie, that settles it. You *must* go away. I'll never have an easy moment thinking of you liable to be attacked again. You must never go out after dark. Promise me."

He laughed and refused to promise. "Dearest, I've been in tight places in Australia. Don't worry your beautiful head about my tough carcase."

"And that little sweep won't stay and protect you. Of course that's why he wants to come to the vicarage." Peggy's indignant remark referred to Mr. Teal. "Archie, do you believe him? A woman to attack him for no reason seems so incredible."

"Well, he swears that he heard a dress rustling, and felt a woman's hands—soft hands—round his throat. The face I saw peering in at the drawing-room window might have been either a man's or a woman's. It was too dark to distinguish which."

"Could it have been Mrs. Garnett?"

"Unless she meant to do for me, and mistook Teal in the dark, that's too far-fetched. And nothing is missing from the drawing-room. Whoever ransacked the place had some object—wanted to find something that they thought might be there."

"But what?"

"Papers, perhaps. The ones in the bureau were anyhow. Good job I don't keep any compromising relics of my former personality."

Peggy's uncharitable conclusions as to Mr. Teal's reasons for so eagerly taking up his residence at the vicarage were shortly disproved. It was not with due regard to the saving of his skin that he had decided to abandon Rose Cottage and the Bishop to the mercies of midnight marauders. He had deeper, darker, less creditable motives, as he speedily revealed.

Mrs. Singleton richly merited the appellation of "sieve", for within twenty-four hours she had told Teal practically everything that he wanted to know. He learned of Mrs. Garnett's mischief-making, which had separated Peggy Fenchurch and her lover for so many years. He heard the details of old Mr. Garnett's will, and also his son's. Finally he coaxed from Mrs. Singleton the admission that on the night of the murder her sister *had* been alone in the house from half-past six until nearly eight o'clock.

Mr. Teal meditated. He was strongly inclined to the idea that Peggy had seen her returned fiancé, and that a quarrel had ensued. Ethel, delighted to find so sympathetic a listener, confided in him how extremely coolly Peggy had taken the news of the crime. "I always thought that she was very much in love with Archie," Mrs. Singleton concluded. "And it isn't as if the money had made up, for she hasn't spent a penny."

Here Ethel blushed vividly, recalling the fragment of talk which she had overheard between Peggy and the Bishop. Hugh had not been particularly sympathetic or intrigued when she repeated it to him. Mr. Teal, who seemed to know Gilbert intimately, might be able to throw some light upon it.

"At least I mean on anything nice," she corrected herself. "Because—it's really very odd—I know that she gives money to the Bishop."

Mr. Teal leaped in his seat. "To the *Bishop*?"

"Yes; Gilbert. Isn't it extraordinary?" Carelessly she related the conversation.

Mr. Teal took Mrs. Singleton's hand and stroked it. "My dear

lady, I shouldn't worry about that. The Bishop is an old friend, and Miss Fenchurch, as your sister, is bound to be the soul of generosity. No doubt he was asking her for a subscription towards something in his diocese. A new church, perhaps."

"Perhaps." Ethel's echo sounded doubtful. "But why did he say: 'I'm deuced hard-up'?"

"A mere figure of speech." Mr. Teal smiled gaily and reassuringly.

Alone, he smoked and meditated. Obviously the Bishop was blackmailing Peggy Fenchurch. Now, what could he know to her detriment? Something connected with the murder, doubtless. Had she been responsible for Archie Garnett's death? If she had gone with him to the archway, a by no means deserted spot at the approximate time of the crime, she had been incredibly speedy and lucky in stabbing him there and getting back to the vicarage unperceived.

Against this possibility there was the medical evidence. Smart man, that doctor. He had spotted the condition of the overcoat, and clung obstinately to his theory that the murder was committed in some house and the dead body subsequently carried to the archway. Surely that was a feat beyond the strength even of a tall, athletic girl like Peggy Fenchurch? She must have had an accomplice. Who was he?

Mr. Teal would dearly have loved to implicate the Bishop here. Unfortunately that prudent and sagacious prelate had taken good care never to be out of the sight of different people who could afterwards testify to every one of his movements. A porter had been summoned to appropriate his luggage when he alighted from the train. The Broadcaster Manor coachman had driven him straight from the station to St. Cleopas. Here there were a great cloud of witnesses to prove that from the carriage he had gone to the vestry, from the vestry to the church, from the church to the pulpit, and directly after the service news of the murder had arrived. No; the bishop's alibi was unshakable.

Yet Peggy Fenchurch *must* have had somebody to help her. How and where had she been fortunate enough in enlisting the services of some person who was anxious or willing that Archie Garnett should be put out of the way? Teal remembered that she had received no warning or knowledge of her lover's arrival in Broadcaster. If he had gone to the vicarage that night he must have walked in unheralded and unexpected. Who could there have been, near enough to be summoned, and his aid enlisted? As he fretted and puzzled, dazzling light suddenly dawned upon Teal's perplexities. He laughed aloud at his own denseness.

Mrs. Garnett had left the church abruptly at a quarter past seven, alleging as excuse a slight attack of faintness. What was more natural than that she should turn in to the vicarage, practically next door to the church, to ask for a glass of water. Peggy Fenchurch would admit her. Although in ignorance then—Teal was well primed as to times and seasons by the guileless and garrulous Ethel—of the part

which Mrs. Garnett had played in separating her and her lover, Peggy would know that the older woman was Archie's enemy. Had she confessed her crime, invoked Mrs. Garnett's aid? Had the two of them watched, and chosen their opportunity? If Garnett had been in the house then both women might very well have murdered him and, using their combined strength, have carried the body to the spot where it was subsequently found. The motive of each was plain. On the one hand, money, possibly revenge; on the other, culmination of a life-long hatred.

Then had come the reading of the will. Mrs. Garnett, Mrs. Singleton had told him, was furious at her stepson's dispositions. She must have had a hand in the murder, Teal reflected, or she would have betrayed her accomplice out of envy. The Bishop had somehow or other become cognizant of the truth. That accounted for his deliberate and insulting avoidance of his aunt, and his palpable and perpetual draining of Peggy Fenchurch's ill-gotten resources. "It's abominable of him—a church dignitary," soliloquized Mr. Teal in righteous wrath. "Now, I wonder which that girl would rather pay—me, him, or both?"

A further link in the chain enmeshing Mrs. Garnett and the hapless Peggy was brought to Mr. Teal's notice that same evening. He had asked Mrs. Singleton for some paper in which to make up a parcel for the laundry, and amongst the miscellaneous sheets which she produced was an old copy of the *Broadcaster Advertiser*. It bore a date during the week following the murder, and Mr. Teal scanned it anxiously lest some pearl of information should have escaped his Argus eye at the public library. There was nothing new or illuminating in the columns dealing with the crime (practically the entire paper was devoted to it), but an advertisement suddenly caught his attention.

Lost or stolen from Broadcaster Manor, between Sunday evening, September 27th and Monday afternoon, a metal dagger or knife, with brown stone in handle. Foreign curiosity, of no value. A reward will be paid to anyone returning the same to Mrs. Garnett at the above address, or to the office of this paper.

Mr. Teal sat gasping. What a nerve the woman had! Here, undoubtedly, was the missing weapon which had been used to stab Garnett. She had concealed it somewhere after the crime, boldly announced it to be lost, actually advertised for it, and had no doubt expressed amazement, annoyance, and bewilderment at its disappearance. Had it ever been recovered? The paper was some weeks old. He must ascertain this before proceeding further.

At supper he broached the topic. In arranging with Ethel about details of his stay at the vicarage Mr. Teal had voiced a preference for plain living and high thinking. Taken, to his consternation, at his word, he found the simple evening meal so unsatisfying that he required a little additional nourishment to be brought to his room every night. He sat up late writing, for, he explained pathetically,

he slept so *very* badly. Ruby, his willing slave, cooked dainties for him, and Mrs. Singleton, a similar fool, carried them up on a tray. Peggy refused the office bluntly. She wasn't going to run after the creature, however long his eyelashes. The vicar, who saw little of him, pronounced him decidedly good-looking, but a bit of a puppy.

Teal watched Peggy narrowly as he fired his first shot.

"Oh, by the way"—his tone was elaborately careless—"I saw an advertisement in an old newspaper to-day about a knife which Mrs. Garnett (that handsome woman whom you pointed out in the street yesterday, Mrs. Singleton), had lost. Did she ever get it back?"

Peggy helped herself to butter. "What knife was that?"

"Oh, a gruesome thing." Hugh Singleton had grown suddenly red. "Did you never see it, Peggy? Gilbert sent it to her, and it disappeared recently."

A silken voice supplied: "At the time of the murder."

"Mr. Teal, please don't talk about such painful things before my sister." Hastily Ethel offered her guest more fish. "Oh, yes, you must. Ruby hasn't cooked it at all badly. She was *so* pleased yesterday when you managed a second helping."

Mr. Teal sighed and picked at a fresh plateful.

"I never heard that Mrs. Garnett had lost a knife." Peggy was calm, aloof, uninterested. "In any case it won't have been much loss. The house is full of curious weapons that her husband collected."

What nerve both women had! Glancing at his host, Mr. Teal was surprised to notice how flushed and uncomfortable the vicar looked. Was it possible that he suspected Mrs. Garnett, or his sister-in-law?

"I wonder if Gilbert will come in this evening," he observed hurriedly. The change of topic was clumsily contrived.

"Oh, I hope not." Mrs. Singleton's exclamation came involuntarily, but it caused Mr. Teal to scrutinize her sharply.

"Ah! ha! madam, so you don't like the Bishop?" his thoughts registered.

CHAPTER XVIII

ABOUT A WEEK after the advent of Mr. Teal Peggy was sitting alone in the vicarage drawing-room.

Her distrust and dislike of him had grown steadily. There had been a covert insolence in his manner towards her during the last few days which both angered and unnerved her. What did he suspect? How much did he know? Was there anything behind his remarks about Mrs. Garnett's lost dagger? Her brother-in-law's red face had not escaped Peggy's attention during the brief discussion at the

supper-table. She attacked him afterwards, to his manifest discomfort.

"My dear Peggy, I know nothing about the thing. It used to hang on the wall of the smoking-room at Broadcaster Manor, and the Sunday that Mrs. Garnett sent for me to tell me how abominably she'd acted towards you and poor Archie, I saw it in her boudoir."

Peggy compressed her lips. "Did she allude to it?"

"Not then. She didn't miss it until Monday afternoon. I went up there on Monday evening, to bring her Gilbert's message that he—er—wasn't going to have anything to do with her, and she mentioned casually, just as I was leaving, that it was missing."

"Did she seem to mind?"

"Not in the least. I thought her very cool and sarcastic about it. Said it had only a sentimental value as Gilbert's gift, and implied that that had deteriorated considerably since his unnephew-like behaviour." Hugh Singleton grinned. "I advised her to advertise, as she had no faith in the local police, and apparently she did."

"Well, that sounds simple enough." Peggy shrugged her shoulders. "But why did you get so scarlet at supper, Hugh?"

"Because—hang it all!—I wondered at first whether Mrs. Garnett might have had a hand in doing for poor Archie, and used the dagger. She proved such a complete alibi at the inquest that it seemed a rotten thing to think, and I felt pretty much ashamed of myself. That boy's questions rather brought it all back. Beastly tactless of him before you, Peggy."

Peggy nodded. She meditated telling Hugh of Mrs. Garnett's perjury, but refrained. He might tell Ethel, which meant telling Broadcaster. The dagger episode, its loss at the time of the murder, the fact that the weapon which had killed Gilbert had never been found, were linked together in an acute and disquieting fashion. Who would steal a thing like this dagger, valueless in itself, unless the thief intended to put it to a sinister use? Had it been stolen at all? Had Mrs. Garnett used it, concealed it, and covered its disappearance by a bold declaration of robbery? She was quite capable of this, Peggy reflected grimly.

Her meditations over a basket of darning were interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Teal. Peggy looked up with a start. She found his utter noiselessness a disagreeable accompaniment to his presence about the house. He would come up, stealthily, silently, in the middle of a conversation, and one never knew how long he had been there, or how much he had overheard. Her manner was not encouraging when he took a chair.

"Can't you find a book, or go for a walk? It's not raining."

"For once." Mr. Teal scowled ungratefully. "Beastly climate this. Makes me long to be back in Australia."

Peggy refrained heroically from saying: "Why don't you go, then?" She darned in silence.

"Or Wurrumpoopa," pursued Mr. Teal. He seemed deeply interested in the pattern of the carpet. "By Jove! the rain last night

reminded me of the rainy season out there, although of course it wasn't nearly so heavy."

Peggy sat rigid, her needle suspended in her hand. This horrible creature had been in Wurrumpoopo. When? How long ago? Had he come across Gilbert—the real Gilbert? Her brain reeled.

"I spent some months in Wurrumpoopo recently," Mr. Teal abandoned his study of the carpet and focused his brilliant eyes on Peggy's paling face. "At the Bishop's. Bit curious, isn't it, that he should never have mentioned this? I'm down here on the strength of a kind of introduction from his cousin Archie. I knew him in Australia too. I beg your pardon. Perhaps I shouldn't have alluded to your late fiancé so abruptly." He was watching her like a cat a mouse.

Peggy gathered all her forces. "The Bishop is suffering from a severe nervous breakdown." She spoke coldly, indifferently. "He forgets a good deal."

"I'm not so easily forgotten," complained Mr. Teal. It was evident that he had been wounded in his tenderest point—his vanity. "But I can understand it in a way." Suddenly he leaned nearer. "Miss Fenchurch, I know the Bishop's secret."

Peggy sat very still. Bluff was the only chance. If she could deny everything, beat Teal down, laugh his disquieting revelations to scorn—

"You know, the Bishop's doing a very dangerous thing." Mr. Teal's remark was easy and conversational. "It's sailing pretty near the wind to personate anybody else, particularly a dead man. There's the question of his money."

Peggy gasped. How had Teal found out? She did not know that the real deception was unsuspected by him, and that he merely referred to the Bishop's cool annexing of the well-paying shoes of Aubrey Pouncebox. Fortunately she did not betray either herself or Archie. Silence and a frigid stare seemed to be her best weapons.

"I don't think we can let the Bishop have it quite all his own way." Mr. Teal smiled seraphically. "What will you give me to hold my tongue?"

So that was his object—barefaced blackmail. Peggy felt her colour returning and her temper rise. "You little worm!" she enunciated clearly. "Not one farthing."

He stood up. Furious rage eclipsed his good looks. She shrank, as he came nearer. His next words turned her blood to ice, but her brave front did not alter.

"By Jove! you'll pay for that. I wouldn't take your whole fortune, not if you offered it on your bended knees. I'll have you instead."

Her clenched hands thrust him off. "As if I'd touch you with the end of a pole!"

"You'll have to." He grinned at her evilly. "I'll take a kiss to go on with, please."

He advanced, assured, smiling. The next moment he found himself staggering back, mechanically clutching his assaulted cheek.

Peggy had slapped it, a loud, stinging, uncompromising blow. Her palm was hard from housework, her aim delivered with the unerring accuracy of one of the best golfers in Broadcaster. Mr. Teal no longer wondered how she had been capable of murdering Archie Garnett.

"You little blackmailing sweep!" Her scorn was withering. "You think you can come here and frighten me into giving you money to hold your vile tongue! I shall just tell Archie everything, and let him deal with you."

Mr. Teal pounced. "Archie?"

"Archie, certainly. Weren't we talking about him? You said you knew——" She stopped dead.

Mr. Teal's puzzled stare, his reiterated "Archie?" in accents of complete bewilderment, gave her a gleam of hope. If he did not know the worst—the impersonation of the dead man and the Bishop's real identity—she felt capable of defying him. He might suspect, having known Gilbert, but he could prove nothing. Only the definite production of Gilbert—dead, buried, and mouldering—would do that.

"I mean the Bishop. His Christian names are Gilbert Archibald, and as a child he was always called Archie." She turned away, hurriedly producing her handkerchief. The little theatrical touch, exactly what he himself would have employed in similar circumstances, completely took in Mr. Teal. "Then, when he was so much at Broadcaster Manor as a child, it made it awkward both boys being Archie"—her voice quavered artistically—"so the Bishop has been Gilbert ever since."

"Much more—er—dignified for a bishop." Mr. Teal sounded quite human and approving.

"Yes, but you can't wonder that I like to use the old name. It reminds me of my dear, dear Archie——" Here the handkerchief did great execution.

Both conspirators were silent for a few minutes. Peggy was realizing that she had never heard what Gilbert's second initial stood for, and fervently trusting that his full name might not chance to be written in anything which came within the radius of Mr. Teal. That gentleman, eyeing her thoughtfully, remembered the "G. A. Gifford" decorating the fly-leaf of *The Man with the Red Nose*, and believed her explanation. Her emotion, if genuine, was less credible. Could she speak with such affection and regret the name of a man whom she had murdered? Was he on a totally wrong scent in thinking that she *had* murdered Garnett?

He remembered his rapidly closing eye and proceeded to business.

"I'm not going to say anything more just now, Miss Fenchurch. You know that I know that the Bishop is sailing under false colours, and that large sums of money are involved." He paused. "I'll give you a fair chance. I'll hold my tongue, and let events develop, if you'll make it worth my while."

Peggy walked past him to the door.

"I can do nothing without consulting the Bishop." Despite herself, her voice shook. "Oh, you unutterable cad!"

The short, wintry day was closing fast. She put on her outdoor things and, casting convention to the winds, walked straight to Rose Cottage. The old housekeeper, a lifelong acquaintance and an erstwhile patient of Dr. Fenchurch's, opened the door, smiling broadly when she saw her.

"Is the Bishop in, Mrs. Briggs?" Peggy schooled her voice to calm. "I have a message from the vicar."

The statement, she salved her conscience by reminding herself, was no lie. At breakfast her brother-in-law had remarked carelessly: "Oh, Peggy, the next time you see Gilbert you might tell him that he was perfectly right about that cricket-score." She would mention this to Archie if he evoked the shade of George Washington.

"The Bishop came in, Miss Peggy, a little while ago, and I ain't heard him go out since." The old woman ushered Peggy across the hall and opened the drawing-room door. "It's Miss Fenchurch, my lord."

Archie, pipe in hand, came forward. "My dear Peggy, this is very charming of you." They shook hands ceremoniously. "(I wish that old girl would go. I'm dying to kiss you.) You'll have tea with me, I hope? Another cup, please, Mrs. Briggs, and you might rout out a cake, will you?"

Peggy laughed easily. "Oh, don't trouble, Mrs. Briggs. Mrs. Singleton is out, and I must hurry back to have tea with the children."

When the door had closed she turned a tragic face upon her lover. "Archie, that Teal horror has found out everything."

"Everything?" His pipe clattered to the floor.

"Well, I thought he had, but I believe I've managed to put him a bit off the scent. I've told him that your second name is Archibald, and that you were always called Archie as a child. Mind you stick to that if he says anything. The awful part of it is that he's been in Wurrumpoopo, and stayed with Gilbert."

"With *Gilbert*? Merciful powers!"

"He talked a lot about your impersonating someone else, and a great deal of money being involved." Peggy's brow was furrowed. "What did he mean, if he doesn't know that you are impersonating Gilbert?"

Archie thought rapidly. Teal had stumbled on the Aubrey Pouncebox deception, not the episcopal one. Who the devil did he think the real Aubrey was, if he did not know that he and the Bishop of Wurrumpoopo were one and the same? He must have a talk with the fellow, thresh things out, if possible effect a compromise. He dared not quarrel with him. That wretched novel for Garbage and Gush had to be written somehow.

"I'll settle with Teal." He spoke masterfully. "Don't worry, my darling. He shan't stop at the vicarage any longer." Something in her distressed face aroused his suspicions. "Was he impudent?" he asked sharply.

"He was rather." The admission came with reluctance.

"He"—the Bishop's eyes flashed—"didn't dare to kiss you?"

"You forget that he thinks I'm a disconsolate ex-fiancée." Peggy smiled wanly. "Perhaps it was his way of administering consolation. Anyhow"—a dimple showed at the upward curving corner of her mouth—"I imagine that he'll find it rather hard to account to Hugh and Ethel for a lovely black eye to-morrow. It was swelling up when I left."

The Bishop hugged her. "Peggy, you didn't?"

"I hated to touch him, but I did."

The Bishop's face had grown very grim. "I'll settle the fellow," he repeated. "Are you ready, Peggy? Sure you won't wait for tea?"

"I mustn't, thanks. Oh, you're walking down with me? How nice!"

"I'm coming to see Hugh." Peggy raised her eyebrows at this statement. "To tell him about our engagement," Archie added.

"Archie, you mustn't. It isn't safe, and directly she hears Mrs. Garnett will come forward with whatever she knows about Gilbert, and——"

"If necessary, I shall swear Hugh to secrecy and tell him everything." The Bishop spoke quietly, but Peggy thrilled. "Do you imagine that I am going to have you exposed to Teal's insults, just because he thinks your fiancé is dead and you have no one to stand up for you?"

Peggy smiled. What a dear old cave-man her Archie was! As though Mr. Teal wouldn't kiss fifty engaged girls—aye, and married women also—if he had a mind to. Under the pretence of imitating the children and playfully bidding her "Good-night, mother," he had kissed Ethel the other evening, when Hugh was in the room.

"I don't so much mind Hugh knowing," she admitted. "He might suggest something."

"He might. Anyway, there's nothing to prevent your becoming engaged to the Bishop of Wurrumpoopa. Broadcaster has been expecting the news for weeks. We'll begin with Mrs. Briggs." He drew Peggy into the hall and summoned the old body. "Mrs. Briggs, you'll wish us joy, won't you? Miss Fenchurch has promised to marry me."

Peggy, red as a rose, accepted Mrs. Briggs's good wishes. "Eh, but the dear doctor would have been pleased," she exclaimed. "Both his girls marrying clergymen. Only I hope the Bishop ain't going to take you to them furrin parts, Miss Peggy? Australy's an awfully dangerous country, Mr. Teal says. Kangaroos getting into the trams with you, and snakes under your pillow every night."

"Mr. Teal talks a great deal of nonsense." The Bishop shrugged himself into his overcoat. "Coming, Peg?"

On the way down they met several acquaintances, all of whom the Bishop stopped and informed of his engagement. Congratulations were tinged with envy. How cleverly Peggy Fenchurch had played her cards! She had inherited one cousin's fortune, and was now about to marry the other. Peggy's look saddened.

"They think I've forgotten Archie. They'll say that I took his money, and you're marrying me for it. It's horrid, darling, but it's true."

"*Le roi est mort. Vive le roi!*" returned the Bishop.

As the engaged couple entered the vicarage the graceful figure of Mr. Teal met them in the hall. His eyes were dancing. His whole aspect was one of suppressed mischief. From the vicar's study there came the sound of voices mingled in excited argument.

"Teal!" The Bishop's tone was thunderous. "No doubt you have been puzzled at my greeting and treating you as a complete stranger. I had better explain. When you visited me in Wurrumpoopa I did not then know that you had left my cousin Archibald's residence in dubious and discreditable circumstances. In short, you were a thief. It seemed kinder not to remind you of the past, or of our previous association, so I have ignored our acquaintance, but if you attempt in future to annoy or molest Miss Fenchurch I shall take steps to have you punished for theft. Miss Fenchurch is engaged to me, and is not the unprotected girl that you imagined."

The last part of this long speech appeared to be the only item which Mr. Teal could grasp.

"Engaged to Miss Fenchurch?" he gasped. "But you can't be. 'A bishop must be the husband of one wife.' Ha! ha! ha!"

"So I shall be when I marry her, you fool."

"You can't, I tell you. Man alive, it's bigamy."

"What's bigamy?"

"Don't you know? To marry another woman when your lawful wife's living."

"My lawful wife? What the devil are you driving at?"

Mr. Teal's laughter suddenly ceased. He moved to face the Bishop who, angry, perplexed, was totally in the dark as to what Teal was trying to tell him. The study door opened.

"She's just arrived." Mr. Teal spoke with sugar-coated venom. "I met her looking for Rose Cottage and brought her here. I used to know her slightly when we were both lodging at Mrs. Fosdick's. That's why I was so interested to learn that your name was Gifford. I wondered whether you were any relation of this Mrs. Gifford, and now you turn out to be her husband. Most curious coincidence, isn't it, Miss Fenchurch?" Mr. Teal was being amply recompensed for his black eye.

Two figures were coming out of the study. The Bishop, with a face of stark horror, recognized the woman who had looked at him from the ground-floor window of Twenty-four Shandon Crescent. The other was Hugh Singleton. She was clinging to his arm and crying. At the top of the kitchen stairs stood Ruby, an open-mouthed, deeply-interested spectator, and the scrape of Ethel's latchkey could be heard in the front door.

"Gilbert, I am very glad that you have come." The vicar's voice was grave and distressed. "This lady tells me that she is a Mrs. Gifford, and your wife. I——"

"Oh, Lor'! and the Bishop 'as just been tellin' Mr. Teal as 'e's engaged to Miss Peggy." The irrepressible outburst came from Ruby.

Hugh Singleton looked at one and then another of the group. His face killed any idea that Archie had ever entertained of confiding in him. He turned from the culprit, abashed, hang-dog, to Peggy, white-lipped and proud, to Stephen Teal, scared by the unexpected element of tragedy that hung over the scene, finally to the weeping, patchy-complexioned woman by his side.

"Is this your husband, Mrs. Gifford?" he asked her.

"Of course." She swallowed a resentful sob. "We were married over fourteen years ago, at St. Dunstan's, Bridge Street, where he was curate." She moved a step nearer to the appalled bishop. "Aren't you glad to see me, Gilbert? Why don't you kiss your poor little Laura?"

Ye gods! So this was Laura!

CHAPTER XIX

AS IF THE arrival of Mrs. Singleton were the only thing needful to complete the tableau, she now opened the hall-door and rushed in.

"Peggy!" Ignoring everyone else she addressed the rigid figure of her sister. "I've just met Mrs. Howard. She says you and Gilbert are engaged, that she heard it from Gilbert himself. I do think that you might have told your relations, and not let me learn it from an outsider. I didn't know what to say."

Peggy did not utter a word. Ethel's glance fell upon the Bishop, who certainly did not present the aspect of a newly-accepted lover. She tried to remember that she was a clergyman's wife, that the Bishop was a life-long friend, and extended her hand.

"I congratulate you, Gilbert. You are *most* fortunate, though I say it of my own sister." As he remained blank and unresponsive, she added sharply: "I must say I am surprised at your marrying at all. You always held such strong views as to the celibacy of the clergy. I haven't forgotten the really nasty letter that you wrote Hugh when he told you that he was engaged to me. You said that a clergyman's career was the only wife that he should have, and some wives were a drag on their husbands. What did you say, Mr. Teal?"

"I said: 'A burnt child dreads the fire,' Mrs. Singleton."

"Nonsense! That couldn't have applied in Gilbert's case. He wasn't married."

Mr. Teal laughed. "How long have you been married, you and the vicar?"

"Eight years. Why?"

"Because"—Mr. Teal spaced his words deliberately—"this lady (may I introduce her? Mrs. Gifford—Mrs. Singleton) tells us that she has been married for fourteen—to the Bishop."

Ethel fell back against the hat-stand. "What? Nonsense! When did he marry her, and where?"

Hugh Singleton came forward. "Ethel, this is all painful, and I think that Gilbert might have treated his old friends more frankly. His wife was Laura Wade——"

"Wade!" Ethel almost screamed. "Don't say that she's any relation to Mrs. Garnett's Wade."

"Her sister. A much younger sister."

"Then Wade and Mrs. Tann are your *sisters-in-law*." Ethel burst into tears and whirled round upon the wretched bishop. "And you come back here, posing as a single man, and let Peggy get engaged to you——"

"It's all a mistake." Peggy spoke with admirable calm. "Gilbert rather overstepped his privileges as an old friend, Ethel, and told Mr. Teal that by way of making him behave himself. He was a little too familiar this afternoon, and I complained to Gilbert about it. We—we arranged to pretend to be engaged, to stop people from gossiping because we go about together. It's most natural, when Gilbert knew Archie, and—and saw him just before——" She choked and halted.

"But the engagement's all over Broadcaster." Ethel wrung her hands. "Mrs. Howard wasn't the only one who'd heard about it. Jones, the organist, congratulated me, and that horrid little Zackery Tann was with him and grinned from ear to ear." She paused, appalled. "Heavens! he's Gilbert's nephew."

She continued to weep until she became so hysterical that her husband was obliged to take her to her bedroom. Mr. Teal melted away, and Peggy, apparently paralysed, remained in the hall with the Bishop and Laura Gifford. The latter was still sniffing and sobbing.

"Where are you staying?" he asked her dully.

Her wet eyes lit up. "With you. Haven't you got a house here?"

"Yes, but you're not coming to it." He shook his head sternly.

She stood regarding him miserably. "Oh, Gilbert, you *are* hard. I know you said after last time that you'd never live with me again, but I've been better, I really have. I don't touch the horrid stuff, hardly at all. Nurse said I was practically cured. Do take me back."

"No." His face was adamant.

"Well, I think you're cruel." She broke into fresh sobs. "I'll have to find my sister Mrs. Tann and see whether she can give me a room. Will you walk there with me? I don't know the way."

He acquiesced, with bent head. She passed out, ignoring Peggy. As the Bishop went by she caught his hand and gave it a warm, encouraging pressure. "Keep it up. Don't give yourself away. I'll stick by you," she whispered.

She followed as far as the doorstep, and stood watching the two

figures lessen out of sight. The last of a smoky red sunset was smearing the sky above the housetops. The street, the buildings, the aggressive brick of the church were veiled in a vague, blurred duskiness which gradually swallowed up the receding forms of Archie Garnett and the Bishop of Wurrumpoopa's widow.

Peggy Fenchurch tottered back into the vicarage and, subsiding on a chair in the hall, for the first and last time in her life indulged in hysterics.

Nearly two hours afterwards a bowed and abject ecclesiastic sneaked up the steps and rang the bell. Peggy, her calm recovered, opened the door. He looked years older, which only accentuated the likeness to his cousin.

"Where is she?" Peggy whispered.

"At Mrs. Tann's. We met Zackery, luckily"—he grimaced—"in Church Lane, and he took charge of her. Oh, Lord!"

"I daren't bring you in." Peggy shook her head. "Ethel's furious. She says you've made me the talk of Broadcaster, and that she and Hugh'll be a laughing-stock to the whole diocese. It's nonsense, of course, but——"

"It isn't. She's perfectly right." He looked miserably at her. "Oh, Peggy, I'd never have let you in for this if I'd had the ghostliest notion of such a thing. Gilbert married!"

"And to Wade's sister." Peggy gave a little shiver of disgust. "I hope I'm not a snob, but really—— And he used to be so fastidious."

"Is it too dark for you to come for a walk with me?" Archie spoke abruptly. "I have things to tell you."

"Not a bit. It can't be much past six. Did you have tea? Hugh insisted that I should."

The Bishop shook his head impatiently. "I only drink a cup to oblige old Briggs. I don't really want it. Yes, I think I'd had one before you came in this afternoon." Their eyes met in tragic misery. "I can hardly believe that that's only two hours ago," he muttered.

They took a secluded road, muddy, and squelching under their feet with wind-tangled drifts of wet autumn leaves. The Bishop began his confession abruptly. He had told Laura Gifford everything.

Peggy gasped a little. "Oh, Archie, was that safe? We're at her mercy now. She'll tell everybody."

"I don't think she will." His tone sounded assured. "She seems to have imbibed some of Gilbert's strict views about lying, and regards a promise as a promise."

"Well, I only hope she'll keep hers. As for lies, I've told so many lately that I'll soon forget how to speak the truth." Peggy's dreary laugh held a note of tragedy. "Did she tell you anything about her marriage?" she asked.

"Pretty nearly everything." He bit his lip. "I'm sorry for her, but Gilbert, poor devil—— It must have been plain Purgatory, and I expect he was grateful for the Unknown's knife."

Peggy shivered. "Why did he marry her?"

"Had to, more or less. She was a teacher in a board school in that parish he went to, St. Dunstan's, Bridge Street. It seems that she'd had a better education than either of her sisters, and they didn't see much of her. Gilbert got to know her slightly. She taught in the Sunday school, and she fell in love with him."

He paused. "Go on," commanded Peggy briefly.

"Well, it was pretty low-down. She saw fairly soon that he hadn't a notion of her, or of any girl. Thought of nothing but his work, in fact, and was only waiting to get his priest's orders before going abroad as a missionary." Archie halted again. "The next thing was a huge picnic for half the parish, Sunday school included — you know the style of thing — to somewhere in the country. She managed to get Gilbert away from the crowd with her, and contrived that they missed the last train."

Peggy's face was a study in contempt.

"Of course they had to stop the night at wherever the place was. He got her a room at the inn, and walked about himself until the first train in the morning. He took that, but she wangled a lift in somebody's car and fetched up first at Gilbert's vicar's, with a nice tale." Archie frowned heavily. "There's no need to go into details. She's ashamed now, and didn't spare herself in the telling, but the upshot of it was that the vicar, pretty stiff-necked and narrow-minded, believed her, and said that the only thing for Gilbert to do was to marry her."

"And he did?" Peggy's breath caught. "Oh, poor Gilbert!"

"I'd have knocked the vicar down and told her to go to — Wurrum-pooppa," pursued Archie easily, "but Gilbert couldn't stand up to one or the other. You must remember that he was pretty green, and much younger then — barely twenty-four. They were married — the vicar married them — but it had to be kept dark. Gilbert was afraid to let my father hear of it, and she wanted to practise being a lady for a bit before she sprang the news on her family. There! that's beastly of me," he broke off remorsefully.

"Not a bit. Oh, how could Gilbert be so foolish and cowardly?" Peggy's temporary sympathy evaporated. "Archie, do you think that your father got to know, and that that's why he left him nothing in his will?"

"It may have been. You remember our pleasant meeting last week with my estimable stepmother? Didn't she imply then that I — Gilbert, I mean — couldn't marry you, and hinted at some obstacle? Obviously she meant this marriage. She said that Wade had told her."

"But does Wade know? Oh, of course she must, or why did she ask you how Laura was? But go on. What happened?"

"The next thing seems to have been Gilbert's going out to Wurrum-pooppa. It was such an unhealthy part where they were sending him that he couldn't possibly take a wife with him. He had to lie low about his marriage and go without her. She didn't want him to go at all, but he was firm and went. By that time he'd found out

what it was like living with her, although mercifully there were no children."

"And what did she do?"

"Chucked her teaching, went into lodgings, got thoroughly idle, and"—Archie cleared his throat—"I'm afraid she began to drink."

"Oh, how dreadful!"

"Gilbert used to send her plenty of money—too much, in fact. Then he wrote to suggest that she joined him as he was in another part, where the climate was better. She sent for her sisters, told them about her marriage, and although Wade behaved decently I gathered that Mrs. Tann has been levying a species of mild blackmail ever since. Gilbert certainly sent her money, and I've a notion now that one thing which he may have wanted to come here for was to see her, perhaps to pay her off with a lump sum. I don't know. It's just an idea of mine."

Peggy sank her voice. "Could she have had anything to do with his murder? You know Gilbert told you that he had an appointment with somebody. Was it possibly with her?"

"Not likely that she'd kill the goose that laid the golden eggs. A live bishop, married to her sister, and not wanting the fact known, was far more use to her than a dead body. Besides, on that Sunday evening the whole Tann family were out. There was a big show on at the Baptist chapel which they attend, and they didn't get back till between eight and nine. Don't you remember Zackery telling us when we caught him in the church that night?"

"But has Mrs. Tann never asked you for money? She thinks you're Gilbert, you know."

"That struck me too, and I asked Mrs. Gifford. She hasn't yet, because she gets it in quarterly payments and had just had one in September. I'll hear from her fast enough if I don't stump up in January."

Peggy sighed. "Well, go on about Gilbert's marriage."

"Right! Where was I? Oh, I remember. The next thing was that his wife went out to him, and the voyage didn't improve matters. She glossed over the details of the next twelve years, but they must have been pretty awful. She got worse and worse, used to bribe the natives to bring her drink, and at intervals she was so bad that Gilbert had to spend any furlough he got in taking her to Australia and putting her away in different homes. We used to wonder why he never took a trip to England, but the reason's plain now."

Peggy nodded silently. She was visualizing Gilbert Gifford, refined, fastidious, abstemious, tied to this ill-bred, cunning, intemperate woman. His career could have been no pleasure to him with such a fetter upon his success, this secret in the background. Finally his wife had become so impossible that he refused to live with her any longer, and arranged for her to remain in Melbourne under proper care.

"I gathered that this coming home was a kind of desperate expedient." Archie continued his tale. "He sent her, in charge of

a nurse, in the *Australian Star*, which sailed from Sydney a week before he and I left in the *Kangaroo*. He went to see her off. I don't wonder he was in good spirits at the prospect of a voyage without her. The nurse had instructions to draw on Gilbert's London bank for expenses, and was to take Mrs. Gifford to rooms she knew of at a Mrs. Fosdick's until Gilbert arrived. No decent hotel or nice house would take them in, and she was obliged to go to Shandon Crescent, dingy but respectable, where Teal lodged. He used to get her drink on the sly. I saw her looking out of the window the day I went to hunt up Teal, and of course she and the nurse thought that I was Gilbert. The nurse wanted me to come in and see her, but naturally I refused, and couldn't make head or tail of it."

"You never told me. Then how did she turn up here?"

"Teal—in all innocence—told her that he was coming to stay with me, and mentioned my address. She gave the nurse the slip (by the way, she'll be pretty worried about her, so I wired to her that her patient was safe), and here she is, and Heaven knows what'll happen next."

"But you told her that you weren't Gilbert. Does she know he's dead?"

"Oh, rather! and was very upset because she'd promised not to give me away and consequently can't wear weeds. The only thing I can think of to do with her is to take her straight back to Mrs. Fosdick's and give her some sort of allowance till things straighten out. It'll be your money," he added with a grin.

Peggy sighed and agreed. Laura Gifford was safe at Mrs. Tann's for the night, and in the morning could be returned to her lodgings. The chief thing which troubled Peggy was whether she were to be depended upon to keep Archie's secret. As events turned out Peggy need not have been anxious. A thing bigger than money or remorse was to ensure Laura Gifford's silence more effectually than any temporary bribe.

Peggy slept badly, and at seven o'clock welcomed the noisy entrance of Ruby, bearing hot water in a battered can. She brought something else, a delicious morsel of startling news.

"Please, Miss Peggy"—she came to stand by the bed with distended eyes—"Bill Barton, wot brings the milk, says as 'ow there's been another murder 'ere."

Peggy sat up in bed. "Another *what*, Ruby?" Instantly her thoughts flew to Archie. Had the unknown terror struck him down?

"It's the lady as was 'ere last evenin', Miss Peggy, and said she was married on the Bishop." Ruby licked thick lips. "They've found 'er dead body under the h'archway w'ere Mr. h'Archie Garnett's body was found. Ain't it funny that I should be the person to tell you both times, miss? Will you tell the vicar and Mrs. Singleton, or shall I?"

CHAPTER XX

THE BAN IMPOSED on the Bishop's visiting St. Cleopas' vicarage was removed within a few hours of his becoming a widower. The vicar, prompted by the police, sent for him. He appeared, lined, haggard, his eyes darkly-circled, but his aspect was certainly not that of a bereaved husband. The fact of his being in bad odour in Broadcaster became abundantly plain to him as he walked from Rose Cottage to the Singletons' house. Groups of people, gathered to discuss this new tragedy, turned to point him out and stare after him. He heard whispers, saw covert nudging, and easily imagined the things which were being said. For years the Bishop of Wurrumpoopa had been regarded as a bachelor, a confirmed celibate. In this character he had returned to his native town, and immediately succumbed to the attractions of Miss Peggy Fenchurch, whom he rendered thoroughly conspicuous by his attentions. On the heels of the long-anticipated announcement of their engagement, the Bishop's wife—no recent acquisition, but a marriage of fourteen years' standing—appears, and that very night is murdered. By whom? The Bishop, of course. His motive—Peggy Fenchurch and her money—was as plain as the nose on anybody's face.

Hugh Singleton met the Bishop in the hall. They shook hands silently. Ethel appeared, kissed him, called herself a hard-hearted wretch, and subsequently snubbed Mr. Teal severely for inquiring affably whether she thought that her sister would marry the Bishop after a suitable interval. There was no sign of Peggy. With a sinking heart Archie realized that he must carry through this fresh deception alone. What a mercy, in a way, that Gilbert was dead! How he would have loathed mud and publicity.

The vicar gave his friend's arm a sympathetic pressure. "Sorry I was so rough with you last night, old chap."

"You weren't. I behaved abominably." Archie bit his lip. Would Hugh ever forgive him when he learned the truth?

The Bishop was wanted at the police-station, to identify certain articles. Should he go with him? Hugh Singleton asked. The other acquiesced gratefully, but was surprised to find a car awaiting them at the front-door.

"Can't we walk down?" He spoke impatiently. "It's no distance, and I suppose there isn't any immediate hurry?"

The vicar reddened. "Well, as a matter of fact, the police thought that it might be safer if you drove. The truth is, Gilbert, there seems to be rather a hostile feeling against you in Broadcaster."

The Bishop laughed shortly. "I suppose people believe that I murdered my wife? Can't say that I exactly blame them."

"My dear fellow, that idea's too preposterous for any sane individual to entertain. Besides, you can account for your movements, I suppose?"

The Bishop nodded.

"That's good. But, to speak plainly, it's very unfortunate that you and Peggy should have been so much together since your return. Of course you two are old friends, and good friends, but a place like this can't see a man and a woman going about in each other's company without coupling their names."

The Bishop stifled a groan.

"Did Peggy know of your marriage?"

"No." The Bishop stared out of the car window instead of looking at his questioner.

"Well, then—— I hate talking like this, Gilbert. It's rotten when we've known each other so long, but what is this story of your engagement to her? Teal says that you told him yourself last night, Mrs. Howard told Ethel, and it seems pretty well all over Broadcaster. I can't understand it. Have you acted fairly by Peggy? We're her only relatives, poor girl, and we do feel responsible."

The Bishop turned desperately to his tormentor. "Hugh, it's just what Peggy said in the hall yesterday evening. That fellow Teal tried to kiss her, and knowing that I'd brought him down here she naturally complained to me. We—we arranged to pretend to be engaged, to stop people's tongues." A brilliant inspiration visited him. "You know, since she inherited poor Archie's money, Peggy has been pestered by fortune-hunters. We hoped that if she was known to be engaged it might keep them off. She hasn't a spark of liking for me, I—I mean as a husband. Honestly, I don't think she'll ever marry anyone but Archie."

The vicar sat frowning and displeased. "I can only say, Gilbert, that in my opinion neither of you has behaved well. A bogus engagement, which you and she had no intention of fulfilling! And to stop people from gossiping because you were too much together. Why is it necessary for you to see such a lot of one another?"

"We—we're friends." The Bishop choked.

"I only hope there is nothing more than friendship." Hugh Singleton's tone was very grave. "I believe you"—he spoke with emphasis—"but I'm afraid that very few people will."

That Broadcaster shared the vicar's opinion was evidenced by the hostile and abusive crowd gathered before the police-station. It required a large cordon of police (reinforcements had had to be summoned from Thorpe) to get the Bishop and his companion safely from the taxi into the office. Missiles were hurled, strong language used, threats and opprobrious terms flung at the former. He did not flinch or hurry, merely turning his strong, tanned face and steady eyes towards the howling women and sullen men who, judged by their aspect, would gladly have torn him limb from limb. They raised a roar of disappointment when a stout door shut him from their sight and wrath.

Inspector James, whom Mrs. Garnett had included in her classification of the Broadcaster police as "thick-headed country bumpkins," came forward to receive the two clergymen. He was on his mettle. He knew that he had failed lamentably over the Garnett murder.

Nearly six weeks had elapsed since its committal without a trace of either clue or criminal. The inspector was inclined to consider this second crime the work of the same hand as had been responsible for the first. Were they to have another "Jack the Ripper" in Broadcaster?

He looked with grudging admiration at the tall man who entered, calm and unperturbed. "Whew! That's a nasty lot to encounter. You've got more nerve than I'd have given you credit for, Bishop. Suppose you got used to facing savages in Wurrumpoopo?"

"I suppose so." The Bishop spoke shortly. "Am I to consider myself under arrest, Inspector?"

The other laughed. "Lord! no. We merely want you to tell us if one or two things we have here belonged to the poor lady. (Most tragic affair, I'm sure—very sorry for you.) If possible we hope that you can identify the weapon."

The Bishop and Hugh Singleton exclaimed simultaneously. "You've found the weapon?"

"It was left in the wound."

In a small office, smelling of furniture-polish and officialdom, the Bishop was shown a smart lizard-skin handbag, containing a handkerchief and a few feminine trifles, which he remembered to have seen Mrs. Gifford carrying. Inside was a severely plain and practical purse, bearing the initials M. W. In shamed accents the Bishop confessed that this belonged to his wife's nurse. "It was unfortunately impossible to allow her to keep any money in her own possession. She told me last night that she had taken it when the nurse was out of the room, and spent the contents on her railway-fare here."

The Inspector coughed and Hugh Singleton gave his friend's arm a sympathetic pressure. What a wife, particularly for a church dignitary! No wonder that he had not been anxious to blazon his marriage abroad. Inspector James, after years of experience in handling "drunks," decided that the Bishop had been very decent in not alluding to the reason why his wife required a nurse. Poor soul! her face gave her away. He had earlier interviewed the late Mrs. Gifford's nearest relatives, and had been feeling heartily sorry for the Bishop ever since. Such in-laws!

The mortuary was quite near. The Bishop was taken out by a side-door, to escape the crowd, and came back a few minutes later. He seemed so shocked, so broken, that after obtaining from him a detailed account of his movements the previous evening and night the inspector hesitated whether to put him through the last ordeal—a sight of the fatal weapon. The Bishop stared at it uncomprehendingly when it was placed before him, a long, slim-bladed, unusual-looking knife, with a hollow in the curiously-wrought handle where a stone had possibly been. Hugh Singleton, leaning over his shoulder, uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Mrs. Garnett's dagger!"

The Bishop and the inspector both turned puzzled stares upon him. "Do you recognize it, sir?" the latter demanded.

"Of course. It belongs to Mrs. Garnett of Broadcaster Manor, the Bishop's aunt. She lost it, or had it stolen, some little time ago."

"When, precisely, can you remember?"

The vicar regretted his impulsive identification. He felt certain that this was the missing dagger, yet curiously enough Gilbert, the donor of it, had not seemed to recognize it. "It was just about the time of her stepson's murder." He made the admission unwillingly. "She had taken it out of a room where it usually hung on the wall, to show it to the Bishop and ask him its history. He and his cousin arrived together, you remember, and that night Mr. Garnett was murdered."

"Of course I remember." The tone was impatient. "But why ask the Bishop about it?"

"Because he had sent it to her from Wurrumpoopa not very long before."

The Inspector turned to the Bishop to have this statement denied or confirmed. Instead, the Bishop was towering over Mr. Singleton with blazing eyes.

"And you never told me! You never said a word about any dagger being stolen!" His voice shook violently.

"There was no secret." The vicar felt somewhat annoyed. What was Gilbert so excited about? Mrs. Garnett had discounted the dagger as being of any value. "Your aunt advertised for it, but I never heard whether she got it back. Your young friend Teal saw the advertisement in an old newspaper the other day, and had the bad taste to bring the topic up at supper. I thought it very tactless before Peggy, reminding her of poor Archie's——"

The Bishop interrupted ruthlessly. "But the dagger had nothing to do with Archie's murder?"

"Of course not." The vicar remembered his former suspicions of Mrs. Garnett and blushed. "It merely happened to be lost or stolen at the same time. What are you driving at, Gilbert?"

The Bishop said nothing. All his old mistrust of Mrs. Garnett returned. Had she committed the crime with this very weapon and, to prevent detection, pretended that it was stolen? But how had she disposed of it for it to be found and used to murder Laura Gifford? It was preposterous to imagine that Mrs. Garnett had killed her too.

"Do you recognize it, my lord?" the Inspector asked.

The Bishop hesitated. Had Gilbert really sent home a similar dagger? Was it safe to pretend that he knew about its gift? Did Peggy know anything of its existence or disappearance? She strongly suspected Mrs. Garnett, and this fresh piece of evidence had strengthened Archie's own bias against his stepmother. Unconsciously Hugh Singleton came to his rescue.

"There's something missing. What was the stone, Gilbert? It used to be here." His finger indicated the empty cavity.

"I—I don't remember." The Bishop looked utterly bewildered and miserable. "You say that I sent it as a present to Mrs. Garnett, but my memory's all gone to pieces since this breakdown."

The inspector interposed. "Mrs. Garnett will know her own property, sir. Was the stone valuable?"

"I believe not. It was a large, brownish, round one, something like a pebble. Ah, you remember it now, Gilbert?"

The Bishop muttered an affirmative, but he was not speaking the exact truth. A stone similar in description had adorned the ring that his cousin used to wear, and which had vanished so mysteriously after passing into his own possession. What was the connecting link between the two?

"I think, sir"—the inspector was addressing Hugh Singleton—"that the best thing will be for me to show this to Mrs. Garnett and see whether she can identify it as her property. You do, I take it?"

"It is identical, except for the loss of the stone. I never saw any other knife quite like it."

"It's a pity that the Bishop can't be positive about it," murmured the inspector. He examined the murderous thing tenderly. "No finger-marks on it. That means that the murderer either used gloves or wrapped some covering round the hilt when he held it." He laid the knife down. "Well, gentlemen, that's all at present. You will be notified as to the time and place of the inquest, and no doubt, my lord, you will want to arrange about the funeral."

The Bishop shuddered.

By means of back doors, police protection, and undignified scurrying and skulking, he reached the vicarage unmolested. He was allowed to see Peggy, who commended him heartily for improving on her plausible explanation of their twenty minutes' engagement. "We'll stick to that," she declared. "What do you say, darling? You hate my name being dragged into this business? Well, of course it was rather bad luck to have this poor woman turn up so promptly and make us look a pair of knaves and fools." Her voice dropped. "Did you hear anything at the police-station that will clear up why she was murdered?"

"No, but I saw the weapon which did it." His lips were pressed together. "It was a long knife or dagger. Hugh recognized it as one that Gilbert had sent home."

"To whom, Archie? Tell me quickly."

"Mrs. Garnett."

Peggy sat with her pretty mouth ajar, staring at Archie. Here was a new and bewildering turn to the wheel of events. Like her fiancé's, her suspicions of Mrs. Garnett redoubled.

"But you don't think that she murdered Mrs. Gifford?" she gasped.

"No, but I've a strong feeling that she killed Gilbert with that dagger. You remember the weapon in his case was never found. It's my firm belief that she threw it away—afterwards, to divert suspicion, boldly advertised for it as lost, and whoever murdered Mrs. Gifford may have found it and utilized it."

"That Teal toad was talking about the advertisement a few nights ago." Peggy frowned. "Hugh turned crimson and when I tackled him afterwards he admitted that he'd noticed the dagger in Mrs.

Garnett's boudoir that dreadful Sunday, and she told him next day that it had disappeared. He acknowledged that he suspected her until her alibi at the inquest, but you must remember that he doesn't know that she gave false evidence then."

Archie moved restlessly. "I wish Hugh had mentioned it sooner—at the time. Do you remember ever seeing the thing, Peg?"

She shook her head. "But I've been so seldom at Broadcaster Manor since you went abroad. Mrs. Garnett left off inviting me there." She laughed rather grimly. "Guilty conscience, I suppose."

"Of course. Oh, and another queer thing. You remember Gilbert's ring, that you and I raked St. Cleopas for? Well, from Hugh's description of a stone that's missing from Mrs. Garnett's dagger, the one in the ring seems to have been identical. I wonder if there's any connection between the disappearance of the two."

"Were the stones valuable?"

"Not that I know of. The one in the ring looked like a pebble. Anybody picking up the ring casually and selling it wouldn't get more than a few shillings for it, I should say. Of course the ring itself may have been gold."

"It's all extraordinarily puzzling and mysterious. And now the murder of this poor woman. Archie, I'm beginning to think that Gilbert really had enemies, dangerous people, who'll try to kill you next, thinking you're Gilbert. It might be safer to put an end to this."

"What about Mrs. Garnett? I thought you suspected her strongly."

"So I did—and do. Only she wouldn't want to murder Gilbert, and whoever ransacked your drawing-room and attempted to strangle Mr. Teal (I almost wish they'd succeeded!) meant to kill the Bishop of Wurrumpoopa. I'm convinced of that."

CHAPTER XXI

INSPECTOR JAMES FOUND himself confronted with a problem in the case of Mrs. Garnett. In common with all Broadcaster she had heard of the second murder, and was not unreasonably annoyed at being mixed up in another crime. "Two murders in one family in less than two months. It's outrageous!" she stormed. "First my wretched stepson, and now my nephew's wife. Neither of them any loss, but it means such a washing of our dirty linen in public."

Admitted by Walters, the inspector found himself very coldly received.

"I suppose you've come about this disgusting murder of my husband's nephew's wife?" she drawled. Thank goodness that Gilbert was not *her* nephew, she decided. "Well, I don't know anything."

"I have called to ask whether you recognize this as your property,

Mrs. Garnett." Ignoring her covert insolence the inspector produced the dagger.

Mrs. Garnett uttered a cry of delight. "Of course I do. It's my dagger—the one that was stolen weeks ago. I advertised, but I never expected to see it again. Who found it? I offered a reward, and must give it to you for the finder."

She had caught up the ugly thing and was holding it caressingly against her cheek. The inspector felt a thrill of revulsion. Laura Gifford's life-blood was hardly dry upon the blade, and here was another woman fondling and doting on this narrow bringer of death. He spoke abruptly.

"Please put it down." She obeyed in some surprise. "You are sure that you recognize it as your former property?"

"Certainly. Oh, the stone's gone. What a pity! I must get another put in. Something that will flash would be nice. The old one was dull-looking." She smiled up at him from bending over the dagger. "Who found it, Inspector?"

"The police, madam." His manner had grown increasingly grave.

"The police? That means that you claim the reward, I suppose? Wait a minute, and I'll write you a cheque. Will there be a form or anything to sign before I can keep it? You're such great people for red tape, you know." She flashed her fine eyes at him.

The inspector found his task more difficult and distasteful than he had anticipated. Mrs. Garnett seemed so transparently delighted to get her dagger back. If she were acting it was superb, almost convincing. He spoke with deliberation.

"Mrs. Garnett, it is very painful and extraordinary. You have heard of an unfortunate woman who was murdered last night?" He pointed to the dagger, now lying on an inlaid table between them. "She had been stabbed through the heart with your dagger—remember, you recognized it as yours—and beside the body we found—this."

He produced and held up before her eyes a little handkerchief. It was newly washed and ironed, unused and unfolded as it had come from the laundress's hands, and bore in one corner an embroidered monogram.

"Are those your initials, Mrs. Garnett?" the inspector asked sternly.

She nodded. He noted that she did not look guilty or alarmed, merely utterly bewildered.

"Is that your handkerchief?"

Again she inclined her head.

"Have you any explanation to offer as to its being found where it was? You are not accused of anything, but I should like to hear what you have to say. I may mention that your maid, Anne Wade, the dead woman's sister, has identified the handkerchief as yours."

Mrs. Garnett's face had grown ghastly. "Wade washes my handkerchiefs. They are always done in the house."

She had been standing, but now she sat down, folding her arms

on the little table. The dagger still lay there, but her eyes were averted from it.

"Do the police think that I killed this wretched woman?" she demanded.

Inspector James evaded a direct reply. As a matter of fact the police did not quite know what to think.

"The circumstances are so strange and complicated that we have to question anybody who might possibly throw any light on the murder." He paused. "When did you first miss this dagger?"

"On Monday, September 28th, the day after my stepson's death. You were here in the morning to examine his luggage, and so on."

"I remember perfectly. You said nothing about the disappearance of the dagger then." His reminder came sharply.

"Because I didn't miss it until after you were gone." She shrugged her shoulders very slightly. "A summons to attend the inquest was sent to me in the afternoon, and it was when I was hunting for my little paper-knife to open the envelope"—she held up an ivory toy for his inspection—"that I missed the dagger from this table."

"Was it kept there as a rule?"

Her manner showed a faint hint of weariness. "No. It hung on the wall of the smoking-room. I brought it in here to remind me to ask the Bishop about it. He gave it to me."

"What steps did you take when you missed the dagger?"

"I put a notice in the *Broadcaster Advertiser*, offering a reward for its return. It was in three times, but I never got any answers."

"Did you mention your loss to the police?"

"No." She paused and added frankly: "I was so upset and worried over my stepson's murder that I didn't bother beyond advertising. That was Mr. Singleton's suggestion."

"The vicar of St. Cleopas? You told him?"

"He was calling on me—very naturally—on Monday evening. I mentioned the dagger, and he said that he had noticed it on the table the day before. He will probably remember, if you ask him."

"Mr. Singleton has already told us this, Mrs. Garnett. I am glad to find that your account tallies with his." He halted and continued: "Have you any similar weapons in the house?"

"Hunting-knives and so on—plenty. My husband collected them. His nephew, the Bishop, sent this"—her glance indicated the dagger—"to add to these. He knew that I had kept anything my husband valued." She sighed.

Inspector James felt nonplussed. Was she an actress, a liar, or an innocent woman? He observed casually:

"Then a thief, looking for a weapon, would have had his choice?"

"If he went into the smoking-room—yes. They're not locked up. This was the only thing of the kind in this room. I asked the servants, but they all said that no one had been in here, and only the tradespeople had called at the house."

The Inspector made some notes.

"You know, of course, Mrs. Garnett, that this unfortunate lady who has been murdered was the Bishop's wife?"

"I have known for years. My maid, Wade, who is her sister, told me soon after the marriage had taken place." She smiled slightly. "Naturally I did not talk about it. Without being a snob, it was a little unsuitable to have a near relative by marriage married to one's maid's sister."

"May I ask if it caused any difference in your relations with the Bishop?"

"Not the smallest. We corresponded just as before. He did not know that I knew." She corrected herself by adding carefully: "That is, until quite recently. I met him accidentally the other evening, walking with Miss Fenchurch, Mr. Singleton's sister-in-law, and I hinted that his conduct in paying her such marked attentions was not altogether honourable when he was not in a position to marry her. That may have given him some idea that I knew he was married."

The inspector coughed. "I believe that you have been more or less estranged from the Bishop since his return?"

She nodded. "I don't wish to speak ill of the dead, but I attribute this entirely to my late stepson. He told the Bishop certain things, injurious things with no foundation, against me, and I'm sorry to say that the Bishop believed him. His unfortunate marriage would have made no difference on my part, but he is very much influenced by the Singletons, and particularly by Miss Fenchurch, who never liked me. I suppose she saw that I did not consider her a good enough match for my stepson. We had had one *mésalliance* in the family already."

Inspector James, who admired Peggy Fenchurch enormously, reflected indignantly that Mrs. Garnett might be royalty instead of the widow of successful commerce.

"I am afraid that I must ask for an account of your movements last night." He spoke firmly.

"I can easily prove them, Inspector." She sat with closed eyes, thinking. "I had guests, Sir George and Lady Taffendale, and Father Ignatius Xavier of St. Michael and All Angels, to dinner. They came at seven-thirty, and the rector went away at nine. The Taffendales stayed, and we held a séance."

"What kind of a séance?"

"Spiritualistic. Lady Taffendale's a born medium. She gets wonderful messages from her son who was killed in the war. Unfortunately last night the spirits frightened her, and she jumped up in the dark and upset one of a pair of flower-vases." Mrs. Garnett indicated the forlorn survivor. "The vase didn't matter, but she cut her wrist rather badly on the broken glass, so I insisted on her staying here for the night."

The inspector looked deeply interested. "When did this happen, Mrs. Garnett? Try to remember the exact time."

"It was half-past eleven. They had ordered their car then, so

it was sent to fetch Dr. Thoroughgood. After he had dressed the cuts and reassured Sir George it took them both—the doctor and Sir George, I mean—home.”

“And Lady Taffendale remained here?”

“She is here still. I slept in the room with her as she was in pain and nervous of being alone, and she seemed so poorly and feverish this morning that I’m keeping her in bed until Dr. Thoroughgood comes. If you wish her to corroborate my statements I suppose you can see her, but please say nothing about the murder. I don’t want her to have any fresh shocks.”

The inspector promised, and was conducted upstairs. Propped up in bed in a luxurious, semi-darkened bedroom, he found a pretty, fragile woman, with bandaged arm and plaintive mouth. Mrs. Garnett brought the caller forward and presented him to her guest.

“So sorry to disturb you, Rosamund, but Inspector James only wants to ask a few questions about last night. Just tell him, will you?” She glided away.

The inspector felt puzzled. Instead of prompting or tutoring her friend, Mrs. Garnett had given her no reason for the interview, and left him and Lady Taffendale alone together. That did not look as though she had anything to conceal. The invalid, drowsy and in pain, answered his queries without troubling about the why or wherefore of his visit. Yes; they had all dined together at half-past seven the previous evening, she and her husband, the rector of St. Michael and All Angels, and Mrs. Garnett. Yes, the rector went away early. He had Compline. Yes, they had held a séance and she met with her accident. No, Mrs. Garnett had not left her for a moment and slept in her room. Neither had had much sleep. She had been awake since five in the morning, and in the intervals of talking or dozing Mrs. Garnett had read aloud.

Inspector James was leaving the room after expressing his thanks and apologies when Lady Taffendale’s undamaged hand feebly detained him.

“The spirits’ message was so strange,” she murmured weakly, “It was my boy Ronnie’s voice, and he said quite plainly that Archie Garnett wasn’t dead. I was silly to be so frightened, but the spirits never lie, and Archie was murdered last September.”

Mrs. Garnett, cold and composed, bade the inspector good-bye in the little boudoir. He was satisfied, he informed her, that she had been able to account for her movements between seven-thirty p.m. and the next morning. The murder was conjectured to have been committed in the early hours during which Mrs. Garnett had proved that she was with Lady Taffendale. She might be required to give the same statement to the police, but in the meantime no suspicion attached to her. Could she, before he went, think of anything which would explain the discovery of her handkerchief beside the body? The dagger had no doubt been stolen from her house and used by the murderer. He might be the thief, or somebody who had found it,

Mrs. Garnett shook her head. "The only suggestion that I can offer is that Wade may have given the handkerchief to her sister."

"Your maid?"

"Yes. She gets my dresses very often, and does what she likes with these. This handkerchief might have been in the pocket of one of them. I have dozens the same. The monogram is always embroidered for me by a crippled woman at my old home." The inspector, who did not know that Mrs. Garnett's old home had been over her father's shop, looked suitably impressed. "That class of person likes to carry a clean handkerchief. It's just possible."

Inspector James, remembering the dainty, crumpled wisp in Laura Gifford's handbag, agreed, and asked to see Wade. Mrs. Garnett left him with the inscrutable-faced, elderly woman who had gone through her ordeal at the police-station with such unbroken calm. She shook her head when she heard Mrs. Garnett's theory about the handkerchief. Wade had never sent her sister anything of her mistress's.

"We didn't even write, sir." A quiver passed across her rigid countenance. "Laura was too ashamed of her family when she married first to care about keeping up with any of us, and after a time, with her weakness, poor girl, she didn't trouble over anybody at home. At intervals the Bishop was good enough to write to my sister Mrs. Tann, and mentioned then how his wife was, but except for that we'd not have known if Laura was dead or alive."

The inspector looked sympathetically at her. "Then you can't account in any way for this handkerchief being in your sister's possession? You are still certain that it is Mrs. Garnett's?"

"Quite certain, sir. I wash and iron her handkerchiefs myself. I've done so for years, ever since she complained that the laundry put bleaching stuff in them, and they lasted no time. She buys them at Wrights' in the High Street here, and gets her initials—V.E.G.—embroidered specially."

Thoroughly puzzled, the inspector eventually went back to the police-station. The dagger and the handkerchief returned with him. The inquest had been fixed for the following morning, when it was hoped that evidence might be forthcoming which would shed some light upon the darkness of the tragedy. Otherwise it seemed as though the second murder in Broadcaster was likely to remain as insoluble a mystery as the first.

The Bishop, pale and dignified, haughtily ignoring the aspect of the crowd which thronged the precincts of the inn where the inquiry was being held, appeared as the first witness. Having taken on Gilbert's identity he now found himself saddled with his belongings as well.

"This unfortunate lady, Mrs. Gifford, was, I understand, your wife, my lord?" The Coroner settled down after the preliminaries. "Was she not living with you?"

"No." What a crowning mercy that Laura herself had furnished

him with full particulars! "We returned home about the same time, but by different steamers, and she was staying in London with the nurse who accompanied her."

"Pardon me—had she been ill?"

The Bishop stood upright. "I prefer that the medical evidence, when it is heard, should answer that question. For a considerable time past she was not able to be with me. She required—er—super-vision."

The Coroner, himself a married man, nodded sympathetically.

"Now I must ask for an account of the evening when Mrs. Gifford arrived in Broadcaster. You were not expecting her, I think?"

"No. I—I was rather annoyed with her for coming here without telling me, and leaving the nurse in ignorance of where she had gone. I telegraphed to Nurse Woods to reassure her. (That ought to back up all these lies. It's genuinely true.) I refused, rather curtly, I'm afraid, to take Mrs. Gifford to Rose Cottage, where I am staying. She said that she would go to her sister, Mrs. Tann, and see whether she could put her up."

"Mrs. Tann first identified the body." The Coroner frowned thoughtfully. "And what happened then? Take your time, please. We want to get this perfectly clear."

"We had a walk, and talked things over. Then, as we were going towards Mrs. Tann's, we met her boy, who undertook to take my—er—Mrs. Gifford to his mother's. They went off together."

"And was that the last you saw of her?"

"Yes. She promised to send word if her sister could not have her, but as she didn't I concluded she was with her all right."

"Had you made any appointment with your wife?"

"Yes. I was to see her next day at eleven. I hoped to persuade her to return to London."

"Thank you, my lord." The Coroner put together his notes. "We have, of course, traced Mrs. Gifford's movements after she left you. Her nephew went with her to his home, and Mrs. Tann gave her a room, and she retired early to bed." He paused. "You must forgive a rather painful personal question. Did many people know of your marriage?"

"My wife's relations only, and I believe that my uncle's widow, Mrs. Garnett, did." The witness looked away. "I don't wish to speak against the dead, but it was not so happy that I cared to tell outsiders about it."

"Naturally. Quite so. When you parted from your wife did you return to Rose Cottage?"

The Bishop, suppressing his walk with Peggy Fenchurch, replied that he had gone to St. Cleopas' vicarage and then home. Mrs. Briggs, trembling at her unaccustomed surroundings, testified that she had admitted him about seven o'clock. He retired to his room soon after ten, and she was positive that he did not leave it again. Certainly he had not gone out of the house. The hall-door was old and heavy, and the bolts made such a noise that had he opened it she must have heard him.

The Coroner, sympathizing, asked as few further questions as were necessary. Alive, the wife had been manifestly impossible, a drunkard, far below the husband's own social standing, who obviously "caught" him when he was a curate. He must be grateful to whoever had put her out of the way. As a coroner, his duty was to ascertain the exact circumstances attending her death. As a man, he consoled with and exonerated the Bishop.

Slightly whitewashed, the Bishop stepped down. Nurse Woods, arrived from London, gave brief evidence. She had had charge of the deceased in Melbourne and had brought her home. They had been living in rooms at 24, Shandon Crescent since September. Her patient was addicted to intemperance and difficult to manage. She had been annoyed when the Bishop visited the house a short time before and did not come in to speak to her. The nurse had ample funds, given her by the Bishop, but Mrs. Gifford could not be trusted with money. Witness had missed her purse soon after her patient disappeared. Yes, that was her purse. There had been several pounds in it. The Bishop's telegram arrived at 5.45. She had kept it, and now produced it for the Coroner and jury.

The former asked her only two further questions. "Would you say that the Bishop had been a good husband to this unfortunate lady?"

"He was one in a thousand. No tongue can tell what he put up with from her." The nurse's tongue appeared able and willing to do so.

"Did you ever see or hear anything that made you think he would be glad of her death?"

"Never, sir." The plain face flushed. "His one wish seemed to be to cure her of her weakness, and be able to take her to live with him again. He's got nothing to reproach himself with."

There was a little murmur of applause, instantly silenced.

The tide, turning slowly in the Bishop's favour, received a new impetus with the summoning of Mrs. Tann. As she lurched forward and took the oath (grumbling audibly at her word as "a good Baptist" not being deemed sufficient), it was evident that she suffered from a milder form of her deceased sister's failing. In person she was stout and highly-coloured, with badly-fitting false teeth, and attired in cheap, ready-made mourning. She lacked the respect and austerity of Wade, as well as the weak, smudged prettiness and veneer of gentility which had belonged to Laura Gifford.

"Yes. Deceased was her youngest sister. Thirty-five last birthday, the poor dear." A burst of noisy sobs. "No, she'd not seen 'er for between twelve and thirteen years, when 'she went up to London to spend a day with 'er before she joined her 'usbin' in furrin parts. They went to the pictures together and——"

The Coroner sternly stemmed this flood of reminiscence. "Were you in communication with your sister after she went abroad?"

"Well, no, sir. Laura'd got a bit too big for 'er breeches, as the sayin' is, and dropped all 'er relations." Mrs. Tann's tears

evaporated. A spiteful look crept into her mean face. "I 'eard from the Bishop frequent, and I don't say as 'e didn't enclose a bit o' money now and agen, me 'avin' a growing family, and Tann not in regular work."

The jury exchanged smiles and shoulder-shrugs. Pure blackmail, of course. The woman had had the wits to see that the Bishop would pay anything to keep his unsuitable marriage dark. Probably, too, she was feminine enough to want to "get upsides" with the sister who had "bettered herself." They did not blame the Bishop.

The Coroner brought her firmly to the point. "Now, Mrs. Tann, I want you to tell the jury and myself what happened on Wednesday night."

Mrs. Tann drew a deep breath.

"Which I was washin' myself, sir, to go to service at our chapel at seven, when Zack (that's my youngest) come in with wot I took to be a lady." She paused to let this shot go home. "'Mother,' 'e says, 'ere's Aunt Laura.' 'You mind out, my lad,' I says, fetchin' 'im one. 'You knows where liars goes to, that is if they teaches you anythink at that grand red church o' yours.' Which 'e've joined St. Cleopas, sir, the Reverend Singleton's, as if 'is parents' religion wasn't good enough for 'im. 'She says it is 'er,' 'e says, and w'en I looked closer, Laura it wur, but that gone off, poor thing——"

"Did Mrs. Gifford remain with you, Mrs. Tann?"

"She did, sir. Quite the lady, and must 'ave a bedroom to 'erself. We take commercials now and agen, and I gives 'er their room. I lent 'er a nightgown (which I 'ope as these are all married gentlemen and'll excuse me mentionin' such a thing), and after we'd 'ad a drop of comfort together, just to wish each other luck and 'ealth, she goes off to bed."

"Did she allude much to her married life, or her husband?"

"'Ardly at all, sir. Cried a good bit, and said as she'd been a bad wife to 'im and wanted to turn over a new leaf. 'You go to bye-bye,' I says to 'er, 'and be thankful as your 'usbin' keeps you in luxury and idleness, and you ain't got no kids.' W'ich she and the Bishop never 'ad, sir, not even gettin' as far as a miscarriage." Again Mrs. Tann drew a deep and refreshing breath. "So that was that, and Tann and the bigger boys come back from chapel, and we all goes to bed. And next mornin' I looks into 'er room, and she wasn't there, nor the bed slept in, nor nothin'."

"Were you alarmed?"

"Not then, sir. I thought as she'd gone off after 'er 'usbin', perhaps to tell 'im about that there new leaf." Mrs. Tann grinned. "But one o' the boys come in afore breakfus with a loaf as I'd sent 'im for, and he tells us as there'd been a body found, and—and it stuck Tann and me, could it be Laura."

She began to cry again. The Coroner elicited from her that she had gone to the police-station, and at the mortuary identified the body. Could she give any explanation as to why, after apparently retiring to her room to go to bed, her sister should have left the house?

"I can't, sir, and that's a fact. I never 'eard the door, so I couldn't say w'en she went. I slept 'eavy myself, 'aving 'ad a tirin' day, and Tann and the boys say as they 'eard nothink either."

"Had your sister any acquaintances in Broadcaster?"

"No, sir, 'cept 'er sister Anne and me. Laura was never 'ere. We ain't Broadcaster born, but I married Tann, worse luck, and come to live in the place, and w'en Mother died, while Laura was a little 'un, she went to our aunt w'o give 'er a fine education and made 'er a teacher, and my other sister came to be 'ousekeeper to old John Garnett at the Manor. She's there still," Mrs. Tann added kindly. "Maid to old Garnett's widow."

The jury looked with grimaces of sympathy towards the Bishop. One sister-in-law housekeeper to his uncle, and the other the truculent, drink-smelling wife of a small plumber. Poor man!

Wade, next called, had little to add, but took the taste of Mrs. Tann out of the jury's mouths. One of her nephews had come with a message that a body had been found, and she was wanted to identify it. She knew her sister, although she had not seen her since she went to join her husband abroad. The dagger and the handkerchief she recognized as belonging to her mistress, but could give no explanation as to their being found with the dead woman. Mrs. Garnett was only called to identify her property. Her account of her movements on the night of the murder, privately corroborated by the Taffendales and Father Ignatius Xavier, up to the time of his departure for Compline, had amply satisfied the police. No suspicion attached to her, to the secret disappointment of her stepson and Peggy.

Hugh Singleton had little to say. Mrs. Gifford had arrived unexpectedly, and had gone away with her husband about five o'clock. At half-past six, as witness was leaving his church after the daily Evensong, he saw the Bishop in the distance, alone. He admitted that he had been a little hurt and annoyed by his old friend's lack of frankness. He knew nothing about the Bishop's marriage until his wife came to Broadcaster, but added loyally that he fully understood, and sympathized with, the Bishop's reasons for his reticence.

The medical evidence testified that Laura Gifford had been murdered about two a.m., being stabbed through the heart by the dagger which was found in the wound. From the lack of mud on her garments, coupled with the extreme wetness of the streets, heavy rain having fallen since the early evening, Dr. Thoroughgood inclined to the theory which he had put forward in Archie Garnett's case. The unfortunate woman had probably been lured to, or of her own accord had gone into, some house where she met her death, and her body was afterwards carried to the archway. Two doctors corroborated the husband's unwilling admission that his wife had been addicted to drink. Originally she must have possessed a fine constitution, undermined by years of excessive indulgence in alcohol.

The theory that the Tanns had murdered her did not hold water for an instant. The plain little bedroom had been searched, but nothing suspicious was found. As in the former crime, robbery did

not seem the motive. The few coins in her handbag, a Treasury note remaining in the nurse's purse, were untouched. She wore no jewellery, not even a wrist-watch. The nurse explained that she used such things to bribe people to bring her drink, so had to be forbidden or deprived of them.

Eventually the inquest was adjourned for a fortnight in the hope that somebody who had seen her after she left the Tanns' might come forward. It had been the forlorn hope in the Garnett case, and was so in this one. If the same murderer had covered up his tracks so adroitly the first time, he had taken equal care to leave neither trace nor clue when he struck his second victim down.

The Bishop's reception on leaving the inquest was overwhelming. Public opinion had veered round and was now steadily in his favour. He wasn't to be blamed for hushing up his marriage, poor chap. A wife who drank and had such connections! As for murdering her—adjective rot. He'd come in at seven and gone to bed like a good boy.

The men and women who, the day before, would gladly have torn him in pieces, cheered him as he appeared, and sang lustily, "For he's a jolly good fellow." He made his way through their surging, bawling, odoriferous ranks in a vain attempt to overtake Peggy. She had slipped silently out by a side-door, and was some way ahead.

Thankfulness sang in her breast as she hurried home. It was a relief not to have had her name dragged into this sordid case, nevertheless, to shield Archie, she had been prepared to tell the story of the bogus engagement without a quiver. Now his character was cleared, although the mystery was as dark as ever.

CHAPTER XXII

THE SECOND MURDER in Broadcaster had only whetted Mr. Teal's appetite to solve the first. He still harboured his dark suspicions of Miss Fenchurch, and did not place a moment's faith in the elaborate and unconvincing explanation which she had put forward to account for her engagement to a married man. Mr. Teal had been deeply disappointed that nothing was said at the inquest about the Bishop's entanglement with Mr. Singleton's sister-in-law. Undoubtedly the Bishop knew that she had murdered his cousin. He was extracting large sums of hush-money from her, and, confidently anticipating that his wife's existence would never penetrate to Broadcaster, had boldly kept off other fortune-hunters by appropriating the heiress himself. His aunt dared not announce that he was a married man for fear of reprisals in the shape of betraying her share in Peggy Fenchurch's crime, and Mrs. Tann and Wade could be bribed. "He's got some nerve," Mr. Teal reflected. "A woman who get rid of one fiancé

wouldn't stick at disposing of a second, supposing that she wanted to. Can she possibly have a soft spot in her heart for the Bishop, and have put the wife out of the way? It's quite on the cards that after the Garnett business she kept the dagger, and she may have used it on Laura Gifford. And Mrs. Garnett's handkerchief? She might have got hold of that in a dozen different ways and left it beside the body in the hope that Mrs. Garnett would be suspected. I'll sound her."

He did so on the evening of the day following the adjournment of the inquest. Peggy was alone, and very tired, when he coolly invaded her solitude in the nursery. Ethel was putting the children to bed, Hugh out at a Bible class, and Peggy sat with idle hands and drawn brows, trying to pierce the darkness of the future. Mr. Teal's stealthy entrance, his request for a few words in private, were coldly received.

"I'm dreadfully fagged. Can't you wait till to-morrow? If you want another blanket, or breakfast in bed, please ask my sister or Ruby."

"It's nothing to do with me. It's about you." He trod nearer.

"Well?" Peggy sat up, gripping the sides of her chair.

Teal shot his bolt.

"I believe that you and Mrs. Garnett between you murdered Archie Garnett."

Peggy's look was wary, her manner unperturbed. "And how do you make that out?"

"I've collected a good amount of evidence, enough, I think, to justify your arrest." He watched her closely, but could detect no sign of fear or flinching. "You were alone here, in this house, on the evening of the murder, from six-thirty till about eight o'clock."

"Certainly I was. I never denied it."

"You said, and your brother-in-law said for you at the inquest, that Garnett hadn't been here during that time."

"He had not."

"Mrs. Garnett, her stepson's bitter enemy, left the church at a quarter past seven, and was in her own house twenty minutes later. To the Coroner and jury she gave the impression that she walked home up Acacia Road. She didn't. She came by the archway and the moor-path, which took her half the time. At the inquest she practically committed perjury——"

Peggy interrupted coolly. "Did the Bishop tell you that?"

"Ah, so the Bishop knows?" remarked Mr. Teal easily. Peggy bit her lip with annoyance at having inadvertently betrayed Archie.

"It wasn't the Bishop." Mr. Teal resolved to tantalize her by half-hints. "It was a third person who can come forward as a witness, if I choose to ask them."

Peggy shrugged her shoulders. "If they'd witnessed enough to hang Mrs. Garnett I'd pension them gladly." Her beautiful face was hard and set. "She wasted eight years of Archie's life and mine. I can't forget that."

Mr. Teal studied the girl with flattering interest. "Do you think she did it?" he demanded delightedly.

Peggy leant back, swinging a slender foot. "I thought you said a few minutes ago that *I* did," she reminded him sweetly.

"You and she." Mr. Teal hastened to retrieve his error. "In spite of all your denials, Miss Fenchurch, I believe that Garnett *was* here that evening, that Mrs. Garnett came in on her way from church, and that between you you murdered him and carried his body to the archway."

"In broad daylight?" Peggy's red mouth sneered visibly. "I'm afraid that you won't be much assistance to the Bishop with his theological writings, Mr. Teal. Your forte is evidently detective-stories."

Mr. Teale strode about the shabby room, discomfited and perplexed. This girl had taken his accusation so deuced coolly. He had not made it until he had accumulated sufficient facts and data to substantiate it. Was she speaking the truth when she declared that she had *not* seen Garnett on the evening of his death? Did she grieve for him, or had she consoled herself with the Bishop? By Jove! now that he came to think of it, there was nothing to prevent their being married, after an interval long enough to appease Mrs. Grundy. He must act, or this golden apple might drop into another mouth.

"Why on earth should I have murdered Archie?" Peggy asked the question with bored contempt. "We were engaged to be married."

"But you might have got tired of him."

"Well, I didn't."

"Or he of you."

"In that case, why did he bother to come home? Supposing that he was tired of me, as you unflatteringly suggest, he could have written to say so, or he needn't have written at all when he heard what mischief Mrs. Garnett had made." Peggy ended unerringly: "Of course Ethel told you all about that."

"He might have met somebody he liked better on the voyage."

"He might—but he didn't." It seemed as though nothing would disturb her faintly-amused calm.

Mr. Teal pounced. "How can you know, unless you saw him?" Peggy only laughed.

"Well, anyway"—Mr. Teal turned to her desperately—"you must admit that if he were such a red-hot lover as to come tearing home directly he heard you were not Mrs. Singleton, or Mrs. Anybody, it seems a funny thing that he didn't turn up here the minute he reached Broadcaster."

"He told the Bishop that he had an appointment with somebody in the town."

"Who was it?"

"I don't know, Mr. Teal. If you can discover that, I think you'll go a long way towards solving the mystery of his murder."

Mr. Teal reflected that from her indifferent tone she might have been alluding to the family grocer.

"If he were murdered here." He faced her, frowning. "We've nothing but the Bishop's word for it that they ever arrived in Broadcaster together."

Again Peggy laughed, this time sarcastically.

"You'd better accuse the Bishop next." She spoke lightly. "I'm afraid, my poor dear young man, that you've come to a very bad place. First you accuse me of murdering my fiancé, with Mrs. Garnett's liberal assistance, and now you hint at the Bishop. I suppose he murdered Archie in the train, and the body walked to the archway?"

"I believe you did it." Mr. Teal's hands clenched in impotent fury. "I'd swear that you did."

"Why?"

"For his money, of course."

Peggy sat up, flushed, and genuinely angry. This preposterous film-actor person required to be put in his place once and for all.

"Mr. Teal, be good enough to remember that I had not seen Archie for nine years, and had had no communication with him for eight. I knew that he had his mother's money, which is not a very great deal, but I knew nothing—nobody in Broadcaster did, I believe, except old Mr. Garth, the lawyer—of his having made a fortune in Australia, much less leaving it to me. It may convince you when I tell you that I have not spent one penny of his money——"

"No, but you've given it to the Bishop," retorted Mr. Teal. He saw, with immense satisfaction, that he had shaken her calm demeanour for the first time.

"That is entirely my own affair." She struggled for dignity. "We are old friends, and in any case it's no concern of anybody's."

"It's hush-money, obviously."

"Oh, indeed! For what?"

"The Bishop knows something about you"—in his wrath Mr. Teal almost gibbered—"and if it's not got to do with your share in Garnett's murder, I'll—I'll eat my head."

"I wish you would, and that it might choke you," ran Miss Fenchurch's inelegant reflection.

"He made you promise to marry him, I'd swear, because it was the only way that he'd agree to hold his tongue."

"You forget. He was married then, and could hardly have anticipated his wife's being got out of the way so promptly and conveniently. Our engagement, a very temporary one, was merely a blind. We wanted to stop people like you from gossiping because we were a good deal together——"

"Yes, and why were you together so much?" Mr. Teal interrupted savagely. He came and stood by her chair, sneering down at her. "Because you're afraid of him, what he knows——"

"There is nothing to know." Her tone was frigid, contemptuous.

"So you say, but I'm certain that you've got a secret between

you. That coroner didn't half do his business yesterday. He ought to have hauled the Bishop over the coals for carrying on with another girl when his lawful wife was alive, and——"

"I wish you would go away and shout and gesticulate elsewhere. Your histrionics are really very trying. I have a headache, and when the Bishop and I want you to manage our private affairs for us we'll let you know." Peggy rose to her feet, erect, smiling. "I didn't murder Archie, the Bishop didn't murder his wife, Mrs. Garnett may have murdered either or both, for all that I know, and now I'm going down to cook the supper. Ruby's out. If you want any extras you'll have to get them for yourself, or ask my sister. I warn you that Ethel can't boil an egg."

She walked towards the door. Mr. Teal was too paralysed to dart and open it for her. "Oh, by the way," she began.

He turned from moodily kicking the worn nursery hearthrug. "Well?" The monosyllable was almost a snarl.

"I thought it would interest you"—Peggy's smile was honey-sweet—"to know that the money Mrs. Garnett was left by her second husband isn't in any way tied up. She might be willing to let you hang up your hat at Broadcaster Manor as a bribe for holding your tongue about what you suspect her of. It's worth thinking over."

A resonant "Damnation!" echoed in the air as Peggy closed the nursery door.

The next day passed without event until the evening. Broadcaster was still full of the topic of the new murder, and the feminine portion of the town showed a disposition to go about in gangs, with linked arms, and to avoid the neighbourhood of the archway after dusk. Laura Gifford had been buried in Broadcaster cemetery, her widower being apparently too overcome with grief to conduct the service. That duty fell to Hugh Singleton. Later in the day Peggy accompanied the bereaved husband for a walk, and retailed Teal's impertinent accusations. She was slightly annoyed that her Archie failed to act in accordance with his outburst of anger at her news. Why did he not horsewhip the meddlesome young man, or at least cast him out of the vicarage, if not the town? She did not know that the unwritten novel weighed heavily on Archie's mind. If he broke with Teal, how was it ever to be finished and silence the clamour of Garbage and Gush? Teal had already completed four chapters very creditably.

The Bishop had been bidden to supper at the vicarage, an invitation which he gladly accepted, being in disgrace at home. Mrs. Briggs was shocked at her adored Miss Peggy and a bishop entering into a bogus engagement, when he was married all the time. Then she'd always kept herself respectable, and to be mixed up in a murder was more than she had bargained for when she undertook to keep house for the Bishop. She was compelled to appear as a witness, which was nearly as bad as being put in the dock. The culprit escaped from Rose Cottage and her lamentations as much as he could,

but outside he found himself besieged by reporters, or curious acquaintances, who made his life a burden with their intimate and impertinent questions. He promised Peggy to have a talk with Teal, scaring or bribing him into holding his malicious tongue, and the pair walked slowly back to the Singletons'. At the foot of the steps yet another journalist buttonholed the Bishop, and Peggy went in alone.

As she opened the door Ruby appeared in the hall. "Please, Miss Peggy, Mrs. Garnett's 'ere."

Peggy flushed. "Ruby, you were very wrong to let her in. Don't you remember Mrs. Singleton telling you that if she called at any time you were to say Not at home?" What could Mrs. Garnett want? The hysterical idea obtruded its head that she had come to announce her engagement to Teal.

"But it ain't *that* Mrs. Garnett, Miss Peggy, not the Broadcaster Manor one." Ruby came a step closer. "She's Mrs. *h'Archibald* Garnett," she whispered confidentially.

"What!" gasped Peggy.

"She says so, miss. She's got a picture of the Bishop leaving the hinkwest, as she cut out of the *Daily Hail*, and she says 'e's the living himage of 'er 'usband, a Mr. Garnett, as deserted 'er in Australia months ago. She saw 'is name in a list of people as come 'ome in the *Kangaroo*, and she's come after 'im. I didn't tell 'er 'e was murdered, Miss Peggy."

"Who's murdered?" stammered Peggy idiotically.

"W'y, Mr. *h'Archie* Garnett, miss, 'er 'usband."

CHAPTER XXIII

FOR THE FIRST and only time Peggy Fenchurch's magnificent faith in her lover tottered and collapsed. How abominable of Archie! It was quite bad enough that Gilbert should have married in that sly way, said nothing about it, and come home as a bachelor, but for Archie to do the same was iniquitous, unforgivable. Her cold hands clenched. What a fool she had been to imagine that for eight years he would stay single, faithful to the memory of a girl who had married somebody else and been too cowardly to tell him herself. In that moment she realized, as never before, how Mrs. Garnett's lies must have shown to him. He had believed her (Peggy) faithless, forgetful. Why should his life be further spoiled and solitary? He had married, returned home, deserting his wife, probably his social inferior, and had lent himself to this ridiculous farce and deception as a means of keeping her off his track. If she followed him and traced him, then Archibald Garnett, her husband, was dead and buried, whereas the

Bishop of Wurrumpoopo could go about freely, untrammelled by matrimonial ties and responsibilities. Peggy chuckled hysterically. What an awful, awful sell for poor Archie when Gilbert also turned out to be married!

She whirled round and, leaving Ruby gaping, ran down the steps. Her slim form cannoned against the Bishop who had succeeded in shaking off the representative of the *Evening Busybody*, and was just coming in. Peggy seized him by the arm, her fingers digging into his flesh. "Your wife's here," she hissed savagely.

"My wife?" He stopped and stared at her. "Heavens! Peggy, don't pinch me like that." He freed his sleeve. "I haven't got one. As Gilbert, I'm a widower. As myself, I'm not married and never was."

"Then who on earth's Mrs. Archibald Garnett?"

"Is there one?"

"Ruby says so. She's looking for her husband who left her in Australia and came home in the *Kangaroo*. She's in the drawing-room now. She saw your picture, a snap of the Bishop of Wurrumpoopo leaving the inquest, and—and she thinks you're her husband."

"But I'm not."

"You'll have to prove it, then."

"I can, easily. Obviously she's on a wrong scent. By some coincidence she happens to be married to a chap of the name of Archie Garnett. He vanishes, and she sees my name in the list of the *Kangaroo's* passengers. Of course she jumps to the conclusion that this must be her husband, and comes to England hot-foot after him. The minute she sees me she'll know that I'm not her Archie Garnett."

"But you must be very much like him in appearance if she turns up to claim you as her husband on the strength of a photograph in a newspaper, and in a bishop's dress too."

"You told me to wear the dress. Said it looked more dignified. Anyway"—he squared his shoulders—"Gilbert and I were a very ordinary type. I daresay we had lots of doubles, if only we'd known. It'll be all right."

He moved as if to enter the drawing-room. Peggy caught his arm again, detaining him. Her voice was low, her words urgent.

"Don't go for a minute, Archie. That Teal creature is always creeping about, spying and listening. I don't want him to overhear, and find out anything. He knows enough already."

"It's quite safe. As we came along I saw him and Ethel in Dene Lane, gossiping with Mrs. Wilkinson."

"I wish she wouldn't be about with him so much." Peggy looked uneasy. "People will begin talking about them next. Why can't you send him back to London?"

"Because for one thing he'd not go—far too well fixed here—and for another I find it impossible to do without him." He spoke sternly and decidedly, but as he caught sight of her face his tone changed. "Peg, darling, I hate to refuse anything you ask me, but

I can't explain just yet. I promised you that I'd see that he didn't annoy you any further."

"If you call being accused of murder 'annoyed'——" Peggy began stiffly. Then she softened. "Oh, of course you know your own business best. I won't say any more. We'd better go in and interview this good lady. Do you solemnly vow and declare, Archibald Everard Garnett, that you are not a married man?"

"I solemnly vow and declare that I am not, never was, but hope to be." He drew her closer and kissed her, whispering: "When I marry you, Peg o' my heart."

Peggy allowed the kisses, feeling satisfied and reassured. What a wretch she had been to suspect Archie for one moment of deceiving her so grossly! Ruby, secure from observation in the dark angle of the kitchen stairs, witnessed the embrace with open mouth. Well, if she ever did! The Bishop, a few days' widower, kissing Miss Peggy. He wasn't going to lose no time, that was pretty evident.

The Bishop, whistling cheerily, turned towards the drawing-room. Suddenly he halted, wheeled round, and came back to Peggy. His face was that of a stricken man.

"What's the matter?" she whispered, appalled.

"I've just realized—it's perfectly ghastly—that she's bound to hear about the murder—Gilbert's murder."

"What if she does? Gilbert wasn't her husband. He was Laura Wade's."

"No, but don't you see?" Archie almost wrung his hands. "Gilbert was murdered, *and buried as Archie Garnett*. She'll hear of the murder of the Archie Garnett who came home in the *Kangaroo*, and naturally she'll think it's her husband. She may marry again, and he turn up. What a frightful complication!"

Peggy realized the situation as rapidly as her lover. Her face paled.

"But they'll tell her in Broadcaster who Archie was, old Mr. Garnett's son, and so on. She'll soon see that you—he—can't have been *her* husband."

"I'm not so sure." The Bishop shook a gloomy head. "We don't know how long this Garnett was married to her, or where she met him, or anything. It'll be just my ruddy luck if they met and married since I went to Australia, and she may claim me—that is, the Archie who was murdered, according to Broadcaster, and I can't explain that it was Gilbert without giving myself away. Good Lord!"

"We'd better go in and see her." Peggy uttered a groan. "I should be quite prepared for something—er—out of the common." She opened the drawing-room door. "Now, mind you stick to it that you're the Bishop of Wurrumpoopa, whatever the woman says," she hissed desperately.

On the ground that the Church always took precedence she propelled the reluctant prelate into the room first.

Mrs. Archibald Garnett was a plump, homely, sunburned, pleasant-faced person somewhere in the thirties. She was neatly, but not

conspicuously dressed, and her cheerful smile displayed good teeth. At the sight of the Bishop she rose from an uneasy position on the edge of a chair and uttered a faint squeal.

"Archie!"

"I'm not your husband," he barked at her.

"Archibald Garnett, that's no way to talk to your wedded wife. Don't stand there looking at me with the two eyes of my lawful husband, and deny that you ain't him."

"I am not. I am the Bishop of Wurrumpoopo. My name is Gifford. I never saw you in my life before."

Mrs. Garnett, junior, crumpled up and began to cry. Her lamentations were noisy, although the handkerchief which she produced to stifle them was scrupulously clean. The Bishop averted his gaze with a shudder.

"Well, I do call that cruel," she sobbed. "Here have I come all this distance after you, and quite prepared to let bygones be bygones when I found you, and you stand there, a-glowing at me, and tell me as you never saw me before."

"I never did." He was rigid and desperate.

"But I tell you that I'm your wife." She stared at him with tear-blurred eyes. "Your wife, Gladys, as you married in Melbourne seven years ago. Oh, Archie, you can't have forgotten the children?"

He uttered a groan and shook his head. Peggy, hitherto a spectator, now came to the rescue.

"Have you any children, Mrs. Garnett? How many?"

Mrs. Garnett turned delightedly towards her. "Three, miss, two girls and a boy. Adelaide, as was born in Adelaide and christened according—she's six—and Sydney—that's the boy—four and a half. We called him Sydney for the same reason, him being born there. And Beatrice is the youngest, and not two. They're with their aunt and uncle—my sister and her husband—in Brisbane."

Peggy choked down an hysterical laugh. "Why Beatrice?" she asked helplessly. "There's no town in Australia called Beatrice, is there?"

"No, miss, there ain't that I knows of, but you see we was living at Sydney, and me and my husband"—a determined nod here indicated the Bishop—"went for a sail in Sydney harbour in one of them so-called pleasure-steamers, the *Beatrice* she was, and me being the mother of two and expecting another, ought to have had more sense." She added delicately: "I take it that you're not a married lady yourself? No? Well, then, it's sufficient to say that soon after starting my husband had to get me home the best way he could, and the little girl arriving that evening we both said she must be Beatrice."

"Of course," murmured Peggy. Her cheeks were scarlet. "Was your husband disappointed at missing the sail?"

"He was, miss, 'specially after having paid for our tickets. He swore something awful all the way home, and then went and got drunk, and gave me a black eye. He tried to kiss the monthly nurse when she arrived," continued Mrs. Garnett reminiscently, "and she

made herself unpleasant about it, but as I says to her: 'Gentlemen must have their diversions'."

Involuntarily Peggy glanced at Archie. It was impossible to associate that frigid, disgusted figure with a wife-beater and backstairs stealer of kisses. The woman must be egregiously mistaken. "But that's not your husband," she protested helplessly.

"Well, miss, he's as like him as two peas in a pod. Of course you're wondering"—she gazed straight at the girl with candid, honest eyes—"that a gentleman would look at me, but he did."

"Was your husband—er—a gentleman?"

"He was, miss. I never rightly got the story from him, but he had a row at home and cleared out to Australia. There was property which went to somebody else as he thought he ought to have had." Peggy and Archie exchanged looks. "He lodged with Mother and me in Melbourne. Father was an octergeranium when he died, Mother being a second wife, and left comfortable. Then she died, and I got the house and a bit of money, being the unmarried one. We talked it over, Mr. Garnett and me, and he said we'd better fix up to get married and live on there. I was older than him, and after seeing to my parents for so long I wanted something to look after, so I took him. It might have turned out worse," she added resignedly.

"But what was your husband?" Peggy felt utterly bewildered. "Did he do any work?"

"No, miss, he just lived at home. He had some money, and with mine we were comfortable enough, but he was terrible restless. First Melbourne, then Adelaide, then Sydney. Never cared to stop long anywhere." She sighed.

The woman's uncomplaining attitude touched Peggy. "When did he leave you?" she inquired gently.

"Eleven months ago, miss. He went out one day (we was living at Brisbane then) and the next thing was a postcard saying he was fed-up and wasn't coming back. I waited and waited, because he used to go off like that often, only he always turned up again. Then my brother, who's in a shipping-office in Sydney, told me he'd seen his name, big and bold, Mr. Archibald E. Garnett, in the *Kangaroo's* passenger list. An aunt had died not long before, and I'd just got the bit of money she'd left me in her will, so I thought I'd better spend it on coming after him, to find out what he meant to do."

"And—and if you find him?" Peggy faltered.

"I have found him, miss. That's him." She indicated the Bishop, still apparently rooted to the carpet. "I've been staying with cousins in Hammersmith since I landed last week, and yesterday we was talking about the murder of a poor lady in this very town—Broadcaster. (I've heard my husband mention Broadcaster, miss, as if he'd had some connection with it.) Julia—that's my cousin, Mrs. Hodgson—had the *Daily Hail*, and was reading about the inquest to her husband and me. At breakfast it was, and I asks is there a picture of what the newspapers always calls 'the murdered woman'.

'No, there ain't,' says Julia, 'but there's her husband, the Bishop of Somewhere (sounds like the queer names in Australia, Gladys)' she says to me, 'leaving the inquest'. I just looked at it, and I says I'd like to cut it out. 'You're welcome,' says Julia, and I did, but I had got a turn. It was my husband, miss."

"But he's not!" Peggy's tone was desperate. "This gentleman is the Bishop of Wurrumpoopa and he's the husband of the lady you were reading about who was murdered."

Mrs. Garnett shook her head.

"I'd take my oath, miss, that that's my husband. He may be calling himself a bishop, and playing at being one"—this accurate summary of his present proceedings caused Archie and Peggy to writhe—"but he's Archibald Garnett, my husband, for all that."

It seemed impossible to shake her conviction. The wretched man turned imploringly to Peggy. "Shall we tell her, Peg?" he whispered.

"No." Peggy frowned him into silence. "Mrs. Garnett, I suppose you've got some proofs of your story? Did you bring your marriage certificate with you?"

Mrs. Garnett withered her with a glance of unutterable scorn.

"Well, miss, it's plain to see you ain't never been married, though with a face like yours it seems a funny thing. As if any decent married woman would come all this distance without her lines." She made a plunge at a beaded bag which she had laid down on a table. "Here's my marriage certificate, and the three children's birth certificates, and I brought Father's and Mother's marriage lines as well, having always been respectable. Burton my maiden name was—Gladys Burton."

Feeling as in a bad dream, Peggy scrutinized the sheet of paper which Mrs. Garnett held out. The Bishop, still moving as though mesmerised, came and studied it over her shoulder. It authenticated the marriage between Archibald Everard Garnett, bachelor, and Gladys Mabel Burton, spinster, which had taken place at St. Bride's, Melbourne, on April the nineteenth seven years previously. The officiating clergyman was the Reverend Percy Pinfold. A groan broke from Peggy and she drew the Bishop aside.

"That's Prebendary Pinfold. He's at Thorpe Cathedral now, and a great friend of Hugh's. If he comes here, he may recognize this woman, and remember the wedding, and be as keen as mustard about digging up Gilbert to prove that he was her husband. Isn't it too awful?"

Archie echoed her dismay. He had not forgotten a purgatorial railway journey, and a buxom cleric who had met Gilbert in Melbourne. The former had actually screwed a promise out of him (Archie) to preach in Thorpe Cathedral. Prebendary Pinfold had married this Gladys Burton to somebody called Archibald Everard Garnett. If Archie confessed to the Gilbertian deception it might only be to find himself saddled with this woman and her brats for life. How could he, resuming his own identity, ever, ever prove that he was not her husband? Dates diabolically coincided to support her charge that

he was. It would take months to seek out and bring witnesses from Australia to show that he had been sheep-farming and single all the time that this other Archie Garnett was living with his wife. He looked despairingly at Peggy.

She turned to Mrs. Garnett. "I see that you're married all right, but the Bishop certainly isn't your husband." Her voice sounded clear and unflinching. "If—if you find him, do you want him back?"

Mrs. Garnett looked down at the carpet.

"I'll tell you no lies, miss. I'd *take* him back, but it's only for the sake of the children. I don't hold with divorce, though I could have got one before now. If I heard he was dead it wouldn't break my heart, but there he is, so it's no good talking about it," she concluded philosophically.

Eventually Peggy gave Ruby instructions to bring Mrs. Garnett a cup of tea, but not to stay and gossip. She herself withdrew with the Bishop to the dining-room to discuss the hopeless situation.

"The only thing that I can see is to tell her the truth," he groaned.

"But what good's that? Don't be so dense, dearest." Peggy stamped her foot. "Can't you understand that if you admit that you're a fraud, and not the Bishop of Wurrumpoopo, she'll only keep on claiming you as her husband directly she hears your real name? Telling her that you're Archie Garnett will simply confirm her fixed idea that you are her one."

The Bishop looked helplessly at his fiancée.

"What were you doing when this woman's husband disappeared? Mind, Archie, I'm not hinting for a single second that I think you're he."

"It's a good thing to have one person believe me when I say that I'm not. Upon my word I don't imagine many will." He thrust his hand into his pocket, the absent-minded little gesture which Stephen Teal had noticed and remembered. "It strikes me, Peg, that when the time comes, if it ever does, for me to return to my own identity, I'll have a thundering hard job to prove it. Where was I, you want to know? On my sheep-run, of course."

"Well, we'll have to get somebody to corroborate that. Is there anyone?" She clapped her hands softly. "Archie, *Mr. Teal!* You said that he'd stayed with you there."

To her disappointment he shook his head decidedly.

"No go, Peg. Teal thinks I'm Gilbert, remember. Far too dangerous to let him into the secret. Besides, it would be no good. We weren't even acquaintances when he blew in, Australian fashion, and stopped for weeks. He just took it for granted that I was an Englishman, sheep-farming there, and knew no more about me than that I was making a success of my job, and had a decent taste in drinks. He could say that I called myself Archie Garnett, but what's to prevent me from having been this woman's husband? Remember, he left her eleven months ago. Teal came to me two months afterwards, so short of tracking down some of my 'hands', a pretty elusive crowd,

who never stayed long anywhere, to prove that I'd been at Wallaby Run for nearly nine years, who's to show that I'm John Garnett's son and not anybody's husband?"

"I hear Hugh's latchkey." Peggy stood still, her breath coming quickly. "I'm afraid I'll have to tell him about this woman."

"Then he'll think that I've behaved atrociously—far worse than Gilbert. We'll both of us have married and said nothing about it, but whereas Gilbert did his Christian best for his poor wretch of a wife, I deserted mine—and our children."

"I know. It sounds horrible, put like that. But Hugh is quite certain that you're Gilbert."

"Which won't prevent him from telling me pretty plainly what he thinks of the contemptible conduct of my deceased cousin Archie." The Bishop nodded dismally. "Better get it over as soon as you can. I'll stay here."

The vicar, agreeably anticipating his supper after a tiring round of parochial visits, culminating in an ear-splitting choir-practice, was met by his sister-in-law, wearing a face of tragedy.

"Hullo, Peg! You look pretty woe-begone, old girl." He turned to hang up his overcoat. "Where's Ethel? Out? I wish she'd come in earlier these dark nights. I don't like either of you roaming about after sunset with such horrible things happening a few yards from here."

"Ethel's all right." Peggy spoke curtly, her nerves on edge from so many untoward events following one another. "Gilbert saw Mr. Teal with her."

"Oh, has Gilbert come? Good! I must have a talk with the old chap and see whether he can't be induced to preach for me on Christmas Day. After a shock like this the best thing he can do is to take up some work and keep himself from brooding." The vicar sank his voice. "Has he ever said anything to you about returning to his diocese, Peggy?"

"No. I suppose he intends to get better from this breakdown first." Peggy's heart beat faster. She must remind Archie to resign his blessed bishopric without delay. Another sermon from him was not to be contemplated for an instant, however selfish Hugh would think it of Gilbert to refuse to help him. As an adroit change of subject Peggy plunged headlong for the topic nearest to her thoughts.

"Hugh, there's a woman in the drawing-room, a Mrs. Garnett. She's come from Australia, and she thinks Gilbert's her husband."

"Her husband!" The vicar stood transfixed. "Peggy, you're not trying to tell me that Gilbert—Gilbert, a bishop—has committed bigamy?"

"No, no, no." Peggy laughed hysterically. "She saw his picture, and—and the likeness to Archie made her think Gilbert is he."

"But, my dear girl"—Hugh Singleton moved to put a brotherly arm about his stricken sister-in-law—"do you mean that—that Archie was married?"

"She says she married a man called Archie Garnett seven years

ago in Melbourne." Peggy gulped. "She's brought her marriage-certificate with her, and says that he deserted her and their three children nearly a year ago. I—I can't prove that he wasn't my Archie," she added wildly.

"I am afraid, from her mistaking Gilbert for her husband, that he was." The vicar's tones rang grave and judicial. "You remember the remarkable likeness between them, Peggy, as boys? Gilbert constantly reminds me of Archie, especially in little gestures and his walk." Peggy's blood ran cold. "In fact," the vicar mused, "if I did not know that the poor fellow was dead, and had seen his body, I could quite well imagine that Gilbert was Archie."

Peggy felt the situation getting entirely beyond her control. If Hugh were to talk like this before Stephen Teal the real Simon Pure would be unmasked directly.

"Oh, Hugh!" she sobbed miserably.

"My dear, I forgot the shock that this must be to you." He patted her hair clumsily. "You should try to remember that Archie believed for years that you had forgotten your promise and married me, and—and man was not born to live alone," concluded the vicar lamely.

Peggy stood forlornly, her face hidden in her handkerchief. What a coward Archie was, hiding in the dining-room! He might at least appear and help her out.

"I'm afraid this puts us all in a very awkward position." Hugh Singleton frowned. "This wife—widow, I mean—and—— Did you say children, Peggy?"

"Yes." Peggy looked up with a defiant gulp. "Adelaide, because she was born in Adelaide, and Sydney, because he was born in Sydney, and Beatrice, because she was very nearly born on a steamer called the *Beatrice*. I don't know how this woman and her husband arranged the sexes so opportunely. I wonder if Sydney had been born in Adelaide, or Adelaide in Sydney, or another boy aboard the *Beatrice*——"

"My dear Peggy, this shock has made you quite hysterical." The vicar looked wildly about him for assistance. "Hadn't you better lie down? Oh, and did you really mean that Archie had deserted his wife and—er—family?"

"Yes. That's Mrs. Garnett, and Adelaide and Sydney and Beatrice. She's left them with her relations and come home because she saw an Archie Garnett in the list of passengers in the *Kangaroo* last August."

"But that was——" The vicar stopped. "Does she know that he's dead?"

"No. She insists that Gilbert is her husband."

"She must be disabused of that idea, and have the news of her husband's death broken to her as gently as possible." The vicar forgot the brother-in-law and became the parish priest. "I suppose I had better do this?"

"I suppose so," murmured Peggy helplessly.

"I can hardly credit Archie with such conduct. To desert his

wife and three young children!" Hugh Singleton sighed heavily. "Peggy, I foresee that this will mean great difficulties. As a married man and the father of a family Archie had no earthly right to leave you all his money."

This additional complication had not occurred to Peggy or Archie. She stared speechlessly at Hugh.

"Don't you understand, dear? His widow will have every incentive to dispute the will, and claim adequate provision for herself and those poor fatherless children."

"Archie made the will before he ever saw her," flashed Peggy. She loathed this heaping of blame on the dead who was really alive and blameless. "I shall dispute it back again. She shan't get a farthing."

The vicar was horrified at Peggy's mercenary spirit. Was it possible that there could be any truth in Ethel's idea that the Bishop was blackmailing her?

"And as for 'poor fatherless children'"—Peggy spoke with trebled wrath and contempt—"how can you be so sloppy, Hugh? She said he drank, and carried on with other women, and gave her a black eye, and finally deserted her. A nice husband and father!"

"My dear, my dear, how very distressing!" The vicar blinked nervously. "It is fortunate that you did not marry him. You would have been miserable. Mrs. Garnett, the stepmother, must have realized these undesirable traits in his character, and that may account for her disliking him so much."

"I'd love to see her face when her step-daughter-in-law walks in." Peggy gurgled ferociously. "It's a pity she didn't bring Adelaide and Sydney and Beatrice too. I hate Sydney. I'm certain that he has adenoids and wears velvet suits. You'd better go and break it to her that she's a widow, Hugh." She added viciously: "She told Gilbert and me that if she heard her husband was dead she wouldn't be sorry."

"Tut! tut!" ejaculated the scandalized vicar. A long course of clerical visiting had persuaded him that the more undesirable a husband was the more his wife clung to him and stood up for him. "'E ain't a bit worse than other folks' 'usbands," was the stock excuse of feminine Broadcaster for any backslider. And now this interloper from Australia, this unknown woman who had married the murdered man, was to hear of his death—and rejoice.

Hugh Singleton found her more presentable and amenable than he had anticipated, but his wrath against Archie Garnett assumed colossal proportions. To descend to this woman, honest, homely, and capable though she seemed, after wooing Peggy Fenchurch! Even if he had believed her faithless he might have chosen more suitably when mending his heart and his dignity. Mrs. Garnett took the news of his death with a grim philosophy that was oddly out of keeping with the traditions of her class. The vicar had expected weeping or anger.

"I hope he was prepared. It's a dreadfully sudden way to meet your Maker." She spoke reflectively. "No, I hadn't seen anything about it in the Australian papers, sir. I'm not much of a one for

reading, and my cousins in Hammersmith aren't long back from hospital—a charry-bang accident just the time my husband was took, so they missed all about it, being hurt in the head, both of them.”

The vicar examined her papers and saw no reason to suppose that her husband was other than the Archie Garnett who had been his boyhood friend and Peggy's fiancé. Mrs. Garnett graciously waived her claim to the Bishop as her spouse on learning of the relationship and close resemblance between him and his cousin. “My word! cousin to a bishop,” she murmured fondly. “I always knew he was out of the top drawer, but I call it a bit mean never to have told me he was related to a swell in gaiters.”

“May I ask if you have any plans, Mrs. Garnett?” the vicar inquired. He wanted his supper, and could sense his wife chafing with impatience outside the door. The widow did not seem to have any intention of departing. These Colonials possessed no notion of time, or the value of other people's time either. Gilbert was just the same.

“Well, I suppose I'll be staying in the town, sir.” Mrs. Garnett leisurely collected her bag and umbrella. “I left my suitcase at the station, and I mean to have a bite of supper and then look for a room.”

He felt a faint surprise. “Are you not going back to your cousins?”

“Not at present, sir. I've plenty to keep me here. You tell me that the police has failed to find out who murdered my husband. Well, I'm determined to hunt him out myself.” Her mouth was set and grim. “Then there's Mr. Garnett's affairs. He had a bit of money, and there may be a will. When you've children, sir, you're not going to see them robbed of their rights, however bad a bargain their father was.”

Supper proved a dismal meal. The inquisitive presence of Mr. Teal put a seal on any discussion of Archie Garnett or his widow. Ethel, hurriedly apprised of the particulars, was inclined to be hysterical, and Peggy to shed tears of pure nervousness and annoyance. The Bishop was openly sulky, and Ruby, resentful because of the delay in serving the meal, had burnt the shepherd's pie.

At the stewed apricot and cornflower mould stage a message was brought in. Zackery Tann wanted to speak to the vicar, please. Mrs. Garnett had engaged a room at his mother's, and would be up at the vicarage next morning for a little advice about her affairs. Upon Hugh's return and report his wife and sister-in-law exclaimed:

“She's gone to Mrs. Tann's? Surely not the same room that——”

“Ethel, Gilbert is here. Please don't remind him——”

“It's all right, Hugh. Ethel was only going to say ‘the room that my wife had’.” He smiled forgivingly at her.

“Let's hope she won't go and get murdered too. Somebody in Broadcaster seems to be making a hobby of murders.” This macabre observation was Peggy's.

“Far too late. If she'd got herself murdered before she came

here it wouldn't have mattered a damn." The surprising remark came from, of all people, the Bishop.

The vicar frowned as he rose to say Grace, an office which the Bishop never attempted to usurp when he ate at the vicarage. Gilbert said very odd things on occasion, entirely unbefitting a bishop. Perhaps being a Colonial bishop made a difference. Really, when one came to think of it, since Gilbert's return they had not had an hour's peace. Two murders, and two unknown wives turning up. The Reverend Hugh Singleton entered his study with a sigh.

CHAPTER XXIV

PEGGY FENCHURCH HAD just come in one cold, grey afternoon, tired and depressed after a long round of parish visiting. At no house which she entered had any topic been discussed except the recent murders, both unsolved mysteries still. The women were friendly, but prying; kindly, yet critical. Peggy felt the unspoken animus in the atmosphere. She knew perfectly well that she and the Bishop were talked over behind their backs, and neither, according to Broadcaster standards, was considered to have behaved well. Archie Garnett's marriage and the return of his widow had of course leaked out, and though Mrs. Garnett, still at Mrs. Tann's, was reticent and not at all inclined to unbosom her affairs to Broadcaster the parishioners of St. Cleopas were extremely anxious to discover whether Miss Peggy would keep her money, or be obliged to give it up. After two husbands slipping through her fingers, first Mr. Archie and then the Bishop, it did seem a bit 'ard. Oh, for the days of respect and class distinctions, or else the power to silence these impertinent queries and insinuations! Peggy scowled as she inserted her latch-key.

The house felt cold, empty, and comfortless when she entered it, and she remembered that it was Ruby's afternoon out which lasted from one-thirty till ten at night. The children were away on a visit to Hugh's mother. Hugh himself had gone off that morning to attend a three-days' Anglo-Catholic Congress at Thorpe, and Ethel—— Where was Ethel? Peggy wondered uneasily.

The clock on the drawing-room mantelpiece, a wedding-present from the G.F.S. to their vicar, struck half-past two. Peggy glanced involuntarily at it, and saw propped up against its case a folded sheet of paper. Her own name was scribbled across. With a sinking sense of foreboding she took it down, opened it, and recognized her sister's handwriting. Ethel often left written messages for Peggy, intimations about meals or the vicar's engagements, but what was here?

Cannot stand this agony any longer. Am going with Stephen Teal—

The writing had been smudged by a hasty application of the blotting-paper, and the rest of the sentence was illegible.

Peggy stood transfixed, the sheet trembling in her fingers. It was too awful to be believed. Ethel, her own sister, Hugh's wife, the mother of young children, had forsaken her wedding-vows, her duty, her home, her husband, her offspring, and eloped with Teal!

Remembrance of his handsome face, insinuating ways, and subtle flattery came back to Peggy. Ethel was very susceptible to beauty, weak, and easily swayed. She had listened and gone, but how she would repent her wicked folly! "She shan't have time to," Peggy whispered fiercely. "I'll get her back, and no one will know. Of course he's done this partly to pay me out. He wouldn't be bothered with Ethel permanently."

She schooled herself to plan calmly. How long had they been gone, and whither had they betaken themselves? It was useless trying to decipher Ethel's smudged hieroglyphics. Her husband would have to be told, sooner or later. Peggy decided to go to Thorpe, find Hugh, and consult with him.

She locked up the house, hurried to the station, and by sheer good luck just caught the express which reached Thorpe at three forty-five. Hugh was staying at the Crown Inn, an unpretentious hostelry which always accommodated the clergy on these occasions. The train was full of parsons, all bound for the Congress. "I hope it won't occur to Archie to go too," reflected Miss Fenchurch apprehensively.

At Thorpe station she had another piece of good fortune. Old Canon Puddicombe, formerly vicar of St. Mary Magdalene's, who had prepared her for confirmation and was now living in congenial retirement near Thorpe, met some clerical friends whom he was putting-up for the Congress. He protested that there was ample room for Peggy in his ancient Ford, and squeezed her in between a very new curate and a rubicund Rural Dean. She was deposited at the inn, sleepy and sun-smitten, and found herself on the well-scrubbed doorstep with her knees knocking together. How was she to face Hugh, to tell him that his wife had left him for Stephen Teal?

The maid who answered her ring was a Broadcaster girl who had been a member of St. Cleopas, and a regular attendant at Peggy's young women's Bible class. She beamed at the sight of her. Yes, the vicar was here. He'd just gone for a little walk before the first Evensong at half-past four. Miss Peggy must come in, and she'd tell the vicar the minute he returned.

Peggy sank thankfully into a shabby leather armchair of the stuffy smoking-room into which she had been ushered. A clock ticked with slow heaviness. Where had Ethel gone, and how could she follow her and persuade her to give up her lover and return? How annoying that Hugh should be out when every minute was priceless! She stared mournfully through the small window at the

wintry garden. Her eyes filled with tears, and to distract her thoughts she took up the visitors' book, bound in scratched leather, lying on a writing-table at her elbow.

In the hall she had noticed an array of clerical hats and coats, and here were the names of their owners. The Reverend Charles Bradall, the Right Reverend the Bishop of Putney, the Right Reverend the Bishop of Runcorn, the Venerable Archdeacon Beale, the Reverend Eli Spike, the Right Reverend the Bishop of Bootle, the Very Reverend the Dean of Wimbledon, the Right Reverend the Bishop of Wurrumpoopa, New Guinea——

Peggy dropped the book with a gasp. Archie here! How dared he? It was the height of folly to come amongst clergymen, masquerading as a bishop, and run the risk of detection and exposure. After pondering a moment she rang the bell.

"Catherine"—she smiled at her acquaintance, the pretty chambermaid—"I see that the Bishop of Wurrumpoopa is staying here. Do you know if he's in the house?"

"I think so, Miss Peggy. He only arrived about ten minutes before you did, and went straight to his room. Shall I go and see, and tell him you want to speak to him?"

"Please, Catherine. He's a very old friend."

Catherine disappeared and Peggy returned to a superficial study of the visitors' book. In a way it was just as well that she had run across Archie at the inn. If anyone did, he would know of that viper Teal's haunts. He might be invaluable in tracking him and Ethel down. "It'll be a good excuse to get him away too," Peggy mused. "I wonder how he came, if he only got here ten minutes before I did. I suppose he motored, the extravagant creature. I wish I'd known. He could have brought me."

She looked up with a start as a deep voice addressed her.

"I beg your pardon. I was told that a lady wished to speak to me." The Bishop of Wurrumpoopa advanced into the room. "Why, it's Elisabeth Fenchurch—little Peggy. My dear girl, what's the matter?"

"Gi-Gi-Gi-Gilbert!" screamed Peggy Fenchurch.

"Of course. Don't stare at me as though you saw a ghost. We haven't seen each other for fifteen years, but I think I should have known you anywhere." He paused. Her reception of him—blanched face, bolting eyes, dropping jaw—was certainly not flattering.

"You—you are a ghost," she gibbered weakly.

"I am Not." The Bishop spoke shortly. When annoyed he became pedantic and prone to capital letters, as Mr. MacScrew had noted. "Feel that. That's good flesh and blood." He held out his right hand, thin and sunburned. Peggy, still in a nightmare, saw on the first finger the marks of a gradually fading scar. To her own great annoyance she burst into tears.

"I wish you'd go away," she wailed. "You've no business haunting people in broad daylight, Gilbert. I suppose you're cross because your murderer hasn't been discovered yet? It isn't my fault. I really don't know why you want to haunt *me*."

The Bishop gazed at her in simple bewilderment.

"My murderer? Who has been murdered?"

"You were." Peggy stared at him resentfully. "The evening that you arrived in Broadcaster with Archie."

"But I never arrived in Broadcaster with Archibald," protested the Bishop.

"Gilbert, you did. You parted in the station, and you went to meet somebody in the town, and your body was found under an archway. You'd been stabbed, and there was an inquest, and I went to your funeral. Hugh and Archie saw the body, and they both said it was yours. At least Archie did."

"It was NOT." The Bishop's accents were thunderous. "I have been in hospital in Sydney, the victim of a murderous attack, and only recovered sufficiently to travel home a few weeks ago. I came direct, landed this morning at Tilbury, called on my old friend the Dean of Wimbledon, who motored me here, and I intended after the Congress to come to Broadcaster and look you all up. How are Hugh and Ethel?"

"Hugh's here for the Congress, and Ethel ran away this afternoon with a man called Stephen Teal. I came to find Hugh and to tell him and if possible to get her back."

"I'll get her back"—the Bishop smiled grimly—"if it's a Stephen Teal that I used to know. He paid me a visit, and took away as a souvenir the gold crucifix which my native congregation gave me on the second anniversary of my consecration. Good-looking scamp without a moral. (By the way, I saw him in Thorpe as we came along.) Ethel's a little fool. How about you and Archibald, Elisabeth? Are you married yet?"

"No." She held up her ringless left hand in confirmation.

"But, dear child, why not? My aunt's mischief-making separated you for years, but the moment Archibald learned the truth he hastened home as fast as ship and train could take him." The Bishop looked extremely grave. "I hope you did not receive him unkindly?"

"No." Peggy choked. How was she to explain? "Archie came home with you, and——"

"Elisabeth, I dislike extremely having to interrupt and contradict a lady, but I must repeat emphatically, once and for all, that I *did not come home with Archibald.*"

"Well, you needn't shout," snapped Peggy. She looked hard at him. "Who did?"

"The gentleman who sandbagged me, I presume."

"Well, he was murdered, whoever he was."

"And buried as——?"

"Archie."

"Archibald? I don't understand. What became of the real Archibald, your affianced husband and my cousin?"

"Oh, he—he"—Peggy giggled helplessly—"people think that he's you."

"But why should they?" The Bishop was completely bewildered.

"Really, this is all very Peculiar and Distressing. Why should Archibald Garnett be mistaken for the Bishop of Wurrumpoopo? The likeness between us is remarkably strong, but Archibald could have explained any temporary mistake on the part of acquaintances of both of us."

"It—it was the clothes."

"Whose clothes?"

"Yours. Archie was wearing them."

"Archibald was wearing *my* clothes?" The Bishop frowned heavily. "But why should he have been?"

"You—or the person that he thought was you—asked him to. He—he said he had enemies."

"He'll have another one if I catch him!" foamed the Bishop.

"You can't. You forget he's dead. I told you that he was found murdered. Of course wearing Archie's clothes——"

"But why should anyone else have been wearing Archibald's clothes?"

Peggy wrung her hands. "Don't you see that they changed clothes and—and identities? Archie thought he was you, and became the Bishop for a lark, and this other man became Archie."

"But surely when he was found murdered nothing would have been simpler than for Archibald to have explained this Unseemly Hoax, and identified the body?"

"I told him that he'd better not. We thought Mrs. Garnett had done the murder, thinking that you—he—it—was Archie. If she believed she'd killed him Archie would be quite safe."

"I see." The Bishop's tone sounded ominously quiet. "And may I ask how long this Outrageous Deception went on?"

"It's going on still." Peggy shrugged her shoulders flippantly. "As you've turned up from the grave, Gilbert, I suppose we shall have to tell people, and explain, and I can't say that I'm sorry. Archie hated it——"

"Going on still? Do you mean to inform me, Elisabeth"—the Bishop's voice, the famous voice which woke the echoes of Wurrumpoopo's vast cathedral, and caused native converts to shake in their sandals, rose to the ceiling—"that Archibald—*Archibald*—is using my name, wearing my clothes, usurping my Sacred Office, spending my money——?"

"There's jolly little of that. We'd have been in the soup if Archie hadn't left a will in my favour, and I've had to give the money back to him every time I got an instalment. Hugh and Ethel can't understand my fearful meanness, and that Teal thinks that Archie's blackmailing me because I murdered him."

"Did you murder Teal? Really, Elisabeth, this is Very Shocking. I thought you informed me that your sister had eloped with him?"

"So she has. I'd murder him with pleasure, only he isn't worth hanging for." Peggy laughed recklessly. "Don't look so severe and disapproving, Gilbert. That's just the face you used to put on when

we were all small and you thought that some of us had cheated at games. Oh, it is you! How Archie succeeded in deceiving people——”

“He won’t deceive them much longer.” The Bishop’s mouth shut grimly. “Did I hear you say that Teal thinks Archibald is myself?”

“Yes.”

“And blackmailing you? A bishop *blackmailing*?”

“Why not?”

The Bishop of Wurrumpoopa reluctantly decided that Archibald’s influence over his fiancée had most unfortunately counteracted any good which she might have imbibed by her residence in a Christian household such as St. Cleopas’ vicarage. Dear, dear, DEAR!

“But who murdered this unfortunate man?” he inquired.

“Nobody knows. He was stabbed, and the weapon never found, unless——” Peggy stopped short. Was it possible that the Bishop did not know of the second murder in Broadcaster any more than the first?

“Gilbert”—her voice was softened and gentle—“have you seen a newspaper recently?”

“Not for weeks. At first I was too ill to read, which accounts for my knowing nothing of all this, I suppose. Why?”

“Your friend, the Dean of Wimbledon, didn’t tell you——?” She paused.

“He’s just back from India. He returned specially for this Congress. We talked missions coming here, when we did talk, but he was driving, and one mustn’t distract the man at the wheel.” The Bishop smiled. “What are you trying to break to me?”

“About—about your wife.”

The Bishop checked a sigh. “So you know that I’m married, and whom I married? I was a fool to think that I could keep it dark. I must go and see her as soon as possible, but I put it off in a cowardly way this morning. She’s in London,” he added listlessly.

“No, she’s not.” By this time the Bishop was sitting beside Peggy. She took his scarred hand very gently. “Gilbert, it will be a shock to you, I know. She—she’s dead.”

Mechanically he withdrew his hand from the warm fingers.

“Dead? Laura dead?” He spoke automatically. “Was she ill long?”

“N-no.”

“I trust there was no suffering?”

“I—I don’t think so. The doctors said it must have been—quick,” whispered Peggy Fenchurch. Again her hand took his. “Gilbert, she was murdered too.”

“Laura—murdered?” His fingers crushed Peggy’s. “But who—who——?”

“It may have been the same person who killed this man that Archie thought was you. She was stabbed, and her body found in the same place. It was done with a dagger that you’d sent to Mrs. Garnett.”

The Bishop started. “She couldn’t have done it?”

"No; she proved an alibi, and the dagger seems to have been stolen about the time of the first murder." Peggy added bluntly: "I know you'll think I'm brutal, Gilbert, but it's a merciful release for you. Mrs. Gifford told Archie everything, and your married life must have been hell."

"Elisabeth, that is not a nice word on a lady's lips." The Bishop released his hand. "Even if it were—uncongenial, she was My Wife, and now she is dead I will not have her memory abused. Who could have wanted to kill her?" he asked.

"I don't know. It's the most perplexing mystery. She came to Broadcaster to see you, poor thing. Oh, and another woman has turned up, a Mrs. Garnett, who seems to have been married to a man called Archie Garnett out in Australia. Of course she saw my Archie's name in the list of passengers in the *Kangaroo*, and thought that he was her husband. Hugh, who thinks Archie was murdered, breaks it to her that she's a widow, and says that I ought, in Scriptural language, to divide the inheritance with her. It's been dreadful."

The recently-made widower gazed at Peggy, slowly taking in the significance of her impatient admissions. His wife was murdered, his cousin was masquerading as himself, an unknown man who had suggested and induced Archie to consent to the masquerade was dead and buried as Archibald Garnett, and a wife from Australia claimed the deceased as her husband. It was all most puzzling, exasperating, and insoluble.

"Do you remember the dagger?" Peggy demanded.

"Perfectly. I had a scrap with some man-eating natives, and one of them dropped it. I sent it home to my aunt as a curiosity. By the way, it's a Papuan head-hunter's knife, not a dagger."

"Ugh!" Peggy shuddered. "And the stone in it?"

"Oh, the stone was one of two—pebbles, I imagine—which formed the eyes of this tribe's special god. When I broke up the accursed thing I kept them. One I had set in this knife, and the other in a ring that I used to wear after I got my finger damaged on this particular occasion." His shrugged shoulders dismissed the episode. "The ring was stolen when I met with this murderous attack, but I hardly require it now." He glanced down at his finger. "It was of no value."

"If you please, Miss Peggy"—the young chambermaid put her head in at the door—"there's a boy outside wants to speak to you."

"A boy?" Puzzled, Peggy rose, went out into the hall, and confronted Zackery Tann. His face was scarlet and dust-streaked.

"Well, Zackery?" She wondered how he knew that she was here.

"I'm afraid the Bishop's goin' to be murdered, Miss Peggy."

"Nonsense! Explain at once what you mean. You horrid boy, you're always playing tricks." She spoke sharply, her nerves still quivering with the shock of Gilbert's return from the grave.

"'Tain't a trick, Miss Peggy. I was comin' past them ware'ouses in Wharf Lane, near the 'arbour, and I 'eard voices. So I goes down some steps and listens. The Bishop was there—your one."

"Go on. Be quick!"

"They was at 'im to tell about w're something was. 'E kep' sayin' 'e didn't know, and I'm afeared as they'll do somethink to 'im to find out."

"But I don't understand. Oh, how horrible! Who's 'they'?"

"The two Chinks, miss, as keeps the Lilyw'ite Laundry in Wharf Street."

A sharp exclamation made Peggy turn. The Bishop of Wurrumpoopa had come into the hall and was listening intently.

CHAPTER XXV

"WHAT'S THIS ABOUT two Chinks, boy?" he demanded.

Zackery stared. Through a hole in the woodwork of that door in Wharf Lane he had distinctly heard the voice of the Bishop of Wurrumpoopa. Yet here he stood, miles from Broadcaster, asking his questions in a stern, direct tone which implied that he would stand no nonsense. Zackery tugged at a disreputable forelock.

"Please, my lord, they're two Chinese as come to Broadcaster about six months ago. They runs a laundry, and lodged with me mother. She gave 'em the boot w'en they didn't pay their rent."

The Bishop's face was perplexed and apprehensive. "And you say that these men have got hold of somebody in some house, and were trying to extract certain information from him?"

"Yes, my lord. They've collared the Bishop of Wurrumpoopa. 'E's the image of you, my lord." Zackery was puzzled, but respectful.

A wail broke from Peggy. "Oh, Gilbert, don't stand there asking questions. We must *do* something. Why didn't you go to the police?" She turned fiercely upon the unhappy Zackery.

"Please, Miss Peggy, I did, leastways I went to Inspector James. 'E didn't believe a word of it, said as he was always bein' fetched for nothink by the Broadcaster boys with tales about accidents or clues to them murders, and—and 'e wouldn't do nothink, miss."

"But why did you come for me?" She ground her teeth at her own powerlessness.

"'Cos yer walkin' out with the Bishop, or if yer ain't yer ought ter be. I saw 'im kissin' yer one day in Tatton Woods." Zackery grinned broadly. "I goes for the vicar, but couldn't make nobody 'ear at the vicarage, and Mrs. Brown, 'er wot cleans the church, was scrubbin' the steps and calls out: 'If yer want Mr. Singleton 'e's orf to Thorpe, to that there Angling-Carthlicks' Congredge, and I saw Miss Peggy runnin' for the train, so I s'pose she's gorn after 'im.' I 'adn't no money for trains," Zackery continued, "but I met the Reverend Smith, curick to the rector wot wears petticoats in the street" (Peggy dazedly connected this with a not unjust description of Father Ignatius

Xavier), "and 'e was comin' 'ere on his motor-bike, and give me a lift on the back of it."

The Bishop suddenly interrupted Zackery's narrative.

"Two Chinese, you said. Is one of them very small, with a scar over his right eye?"

"Yes, my lord. Awful ugly chap."

"Good God!" ejaculated the Bishop.

Galvanized into action, he elbowed the aghast Peggy aside and tore to the telephone. A frenzied flying of the leaves of the telephone-book, a sharp exclamation, and an imperious demand for "Thorpe double seven eight" followed. The other two heard his clear-cut directions to the unseen listener.

"Is that the police-station? The Bishop of Wurrumpoopo is speaking. I want you to send six policemen, preferably armed, to Wharf Lane, Broadcaster, immediately. They are to be prepared to arrest two Chinese laundrymen who have got my cousin in their hands, and I understand are threatening him. The Broadcaster police refuse to believe the story or to send any assistance. You will get into touch with them? Thank you. I shall meet your men at Wharf Lane. Good afternoon."

He rang off, grabbed Zackery Tann by the arm, and hustled him through a side-door out into the inn-yard. Peggy, deserted and overlooked, a rôle which did not often fall to the belle of Broadcaster, swallowed her indignation and hurried after them. Two young clergymen, newly arrived on a motor-cycle combination, were bending over the machine, excitedly discussing the speed at which they had come. The Bishop tapped the nearer on the shoulder.

"Can your bus do fifty miles an hour?" he demanded.

"Sixty," replied the owner proudly. He looked up, saw the speaker's gaiters, and added respectfully, "my lord."

"That's all right, because she's got to do seventy." The Bishop, under the nose of the amazed cyclist, swung himself into the side-car. "Get her ready at once and take me to Wharf Lane, Broadcaster, as fast as ever you can rip."

"But—but the Congress, my lord?" Mechanically the young man obeyed this peremptory prelate. "The first Evensong begins in a quarter of an hour. I—I am to act as chaplain to Bishop Begbie of Blairgowrie."

"Bishop Begbie of Blairgowrie be blowed! Will you start your infernal machine? There's murder going to be done if we're not there in time to prevent it."

The mesmerized cleric darted and turned and pumped and unscrewed. As they set off the Bishop swung Zackery Tann up behind the rider. "Hold tight, now," he warned him. "Don't run into anything, young man, but don't stop to think about the speed-limit."

"Gilbert!" Peggy screamed reproachfully at him above the ascending roar of the motor-cycle. "You must take me. I—I can sit on your knee."

"You certainly can't. It's not going to be any place for a lady,

my dear Elisabeth, and I shall be no party to conveying you into danger. Rely upon it that you shall hear how things are as soon as possible. Archibald himself will probably come——”

The combination tore out of the yard, apparently on one wheel. Peggy, with a gesture of agony, turned to confront the surviving curate.

“Oh, they’ve gone without me!” she wailed. She stamped furiously. “How could Gilbert be so mean?”

“But I don’t understand what’s up.” The young man looked at her with mingled admiration and sympathy. “My friend and I had just arrived for the Congress, and a strange johnny—I suppose he’s a bishop—carries Egerton off, commandeers his bike, and doesn’t seem to care a hoot about the Congress. It’s awfully queer.”

Peggy explained breathlessly.

“Two horrible Chinese who keep a laundry in Broadcaster have got hold of my fiancé. They may torture him, perhaps murder him.” Her voice shook. “The Bishop’s telephoned for the police to try and stop them, and he’s gone himself, but he has a heart of stone to leave me behind like this.” She stamped her pretty foot again.

“But he was quite right. If there’s going to be a scrap, particularly with those dirty Chinks, it’s no place for a girl.”

“You’re as silly as he is.” Peggy’s eyes flashed. “Don’t you understand that it’s my man, my Archie, whom they’ve got in their power, and I can’t wait here till I know what’s happened to him.”

The Reverend Christopher Spencer darted to an adjacent shed. Triumphantly he ran out the motor-cycle which had conveyed Father Ignatius Xavier’s curate and Zackery Tann to Thorpe. The unconscious owner had departed to the cathedral to assist his rector with the complications of his High Church vesture. Mr. Spencer beckoned eagerly to Peggy. “If you can sit on the back of this, I’ll get you to Broadcaster,” he promised recklessly. “Mind, it’s on your own responsibility. I don’t know what that bishop and your fiancé will say.”

“I shan’t bother about that. You *are* a brick.” She swung herself up, and they were promptly speeding over the ground. “Do try to overtake the Bishop. He’d be so wild.”

“I’ll do my best. I say, I’m afraid we’ve not been properly introduced, and there’s nobody here to do it for us. My name’s Spencer, and I’m curate at St. James’s, Windy Heath.”

“I’m Peggy Fenchurch. I daresay you know my brother-in-law, Mr. Singleton. He’s vicar of St. Cleopas, Broadcaster.”

“I’ve met him. Splendid chap with young men, isn’t he?” They swung round a sharp corner. “Er—— Are you the Miss Fenchurch that a fellow called Garnett who was murdered left a lot of money to? I remember reading about it lately.”

“Yes, but he wasn’t murdered.” Peggy laughed wildly. “It—it was somebody else. I can’t explain. There’s been a dreadful muddle, but he may be if we don’t get there in time. Could you go faster if I wasn’t here?”

“It wouldn’t make any difference. We’re doing a good thirty

miles an hour, and a smash isn't likely to be helpful. Oh, there are your bishop and Egerton!"

The combination was visible a quarter of a mile ahead. Clouds of dust enveloped it, and it was evident that the Bishop believed time to be priceless. Mr. Spencer put on speed, sounded his horn loudly as they approached, and dashed past. A flying glimpse of the Bishop's open-mouthed wrath, of Mr. Egerton's scarlet-cheeked concentration on his task, of Zackery Tann's benedictory grin, and——

"Cheerio!" sang Peggy. They sped by and tore ahead. "Cheerio, Gilbert!"

"ELISABETH!" bawled the Bishop. Regardless of danger he stood up in the rocking side-car and made a trumpet of his hands. "ELISABETH!! Come back directly. Young man, STOP! I shall report you to your rector. I'll complain to your bishop. Oh, good heavens! They're nearly out of sight. How dare he take her into such danger?"

"Spect she made 'im." Zackery Tann giggled. "Miss Peggy allus gets wot she wants, 'specially from gentlemen."

"Hold your tongue!" ordered the Bishop sternly. "By the way, what's your name?"

"Zackery Tann, my lord."

"Tann?" The Bishop paled. "Are—are you any relation to Mrs. Tann who lives at 5 Brewer Lane?" he faltered.

"I'm 'er youngest boy, my lord. There's six o' us."

"Then"—the Bishop looked at the grimy face, the shabby, patched clothing, the huge mouth, from whence issued the h'less dialect of the Broadcaster guttersnipe—"you're *my wife's nephew*."

The Bishop, his wife's nephew, and Mr. Egerton arrived unimpaired in Wharf Lane. It was a narrow slant of badly-cobbled street, framed on either side by overhanging warehouses. The harbour, a dark mass of sullen water, lay at the far end. The height of the buildings shut off the sky and made the place, dark and decaying, repellent even to the poorest children of Broadcaster. They never played there, or sat about in the gutters, encumbered with rubbish. As the machine drove up, the Bishop saw a stalwart group of police-constables who had arrived in a fast motor, the Reverend Christopher Spencer, unrepentant and unabashed, and Peggy Fenchurch, scolding Inspector James. These were gathered about a door at the end of the lane.

"That ain't the place." Zackery beckoned and led the way to an aperture between two buildings. "Come down 'ere. Mind the steps, my lord. It's slippery."

The Bishop trod delicately, for the steps, hollowed in the centre by countless feet, were extremely dirty and unsafe. A door, inconspicuous, battered, stood about half-way down, its flaying wood set in the damp stone of the old warehouse. Zackery beckoned again. The Bishop halted and applied his ear to a slit in the door. The

others, including Peggy, had come up by now, and stood behind him, watching that stern profile.

"I can't hear anything." He spoke impatiently. "Boy, are you certain that this is the right place?"

"Quite, my lord. The laundry's inside, and that was w'ere they was."

A painful silence followed. Had the foreigners, unable to extract the secret, killed their victim in exasperation? Did those dark and oily waters not many paces away hide a grim secret? As the rescuers stood there, no one liking to be the first to act or voice suggestion, a scream, a woman's shrill scream from inside, cut the winter air.

"Good God!" ejaculated the Bishop again.

He set his shoulder to the door, which went inwards with a crash.

CHAPTER XXVI

ARCHIE GARNETT WAS spending an exceedingly dull day. He had expected Mr. Teal with a fresh pile of manuscript, but Mr. Teal had not materialized. When he strolled out after lunch and passed the vicarage no sign of Peggy's charming face showed behind any of the windows. He supposed, with slight annoyance, that she had gone to Thorpe, where some High Church affair was advertised to take place.

Without her, time loomed so endlessly that he decided to while it away by exploring his old haunts. The idea of any danger never entered his head. As a boy, the low lanes and mean shops down by the harbour had held an endless fascination for him. He plunged determinedly into the muddy mazes which led by devious ways to the quay.

What a totally different side of Broadcaster this was! Foreign sailors lurched about. The population seemed to be raggeder, dirtier, the streets more squalid than he remembered. Many buildings had fallen into decay and disrepute. If only robbery had been the sequel to the murder it were easy enough to solve the problem of how Gilbert came by his untimely end. Some tramp or tipsy tar from this low part might well have followed him and killed him for the money and valuables he carried. Yet nothing had obviously been touched or taken. They must look elsewhere for the slayers of both him and Laura Gifford.

Thinking idly of her, Archie suddenly realized that he was in Brewer Lane, near the far from aristocratic abode of Mrs. Tann. Now that he came to remember, surely a flight of stone steps ran up from Brewer Lane between warehouses, and led into Wharf Street, which was close to the harbour. He resolved to try this short-cut,

known as Wharf Lane, and with visible disgust was soon mounting the worn and muddy stairs. They went past a door, which he scarcely noticed until it opened and a head protruded. "Please," hissed an unfamiliar voice.

Archie turned. A Chinaman was looking at him, beckoning solemnly. He retraced his steps and asked what the foreigner wanted. His presence in this very English town and setting puzzled and amused the other. Was he just off some ship, or living here, running a restaurant of doubtful reputation? Suddenly Archie remembered the inconvenient questions that one of the choirmen had pestered him with on the evening of his appearance at St. Cleopas as the Bishop. The fellow had asked about the Chinese and their smuggling of opium into Wurrumpoopa. As he knew nothing of the problem he had distracted attention from his ignorance by inquiring how many of the choirboys had ever seen a Chinaman. Zackery Tann had said something about two who lodged with his mother. They kept a laundry. This might be one of them.

"You come?" The man was backing and beckoning.

"But why? What do you want? Where do you want me to come to?" He had no intention of being lured into an opium den.

The Chinese bowed. "There is a ladee here."

"Oh, is there? What's she got to do with me?"

"Me and my flend, we keep a laundly. The ladee come to see. She fall, hurt herself. She say: Send for the prayer-making man. I see you. You come, please." The yellow hands ceased their pantomime.

Archie pondered. Evidently the 'ladee', probably an inquisitive district-visitor, had penetrated into the mysteries of a Chinese laundry, had hurt herself in some way, and demanded her vicar for absolution and assistance. To a Chinese all clergy would look alike. He supposed that he had better go. At least he could ascertain whether she were much damaged and, if necessary, obtain a doctor.

"Very well." He followed the Chinaman.

The fellow shut the door carefully and led the way down a few yards of passage. Rough earth underfoot, enclosing walls, damp and stifling, on either hand. The silence was thick and sinister. Archie shrugged his shoulders. Where the dickens was the Chink taking him? It seemed a rum place for a laundry. How on earth did they dry the clothes?

The Chinese stopped before another door. He said something in his own tongue, and the door was opened from the far side. Archie heard a woman's voice with something familiar about it. She sounded angered and remonstrant. "Am I to come in?" he asked. "It's jolly dark."

He turned, to see that his Chinese conductor had slipped soundlessly behind him. An odd sense of impending peril, of rage at his own stupidity in perhaps having walked into a trap, assailed him. He remembered Gilbert's end. He hesitated. . . .

"Don't come in. It's all a trick. Go away!" The words were

screamed in the woman's voice which he had heard a few seconds before. His blood boiled. So there was a 'ladee', and these dirty cowards were frightening her. Impetuously he dashed forward, felt something stifling, blinding, descend swiftly over his head, and hit out wildly as a pillow-case (so they really did run a laundry, ran his dazed thoughts) was pulled down, forcing his arms to his sides. Propelled from behind, he stumbled at a trot into somewhere that he supposed must be a room. Someone pushed him into a chair, despite his kicks and resistance. Hands knotted a cord about his ankles and then tied it to the chair. His arms were imprisoned and treated similarly. The pillow-case was at length drawn off his head, and exhausted by his futile struggles he looked round him, trapped and bewildered.

The place was a laundry. He saw the copper, the table with appurtenances for ironing, the long lines for drying clothes stretched across the ceiling. Evidently he was in the basement of some old warehouse, far from human assistance, powerless in the hands of two Chinese, one a peculiarly objectionable-looking specimen, with a scar above his right eye. In a chair, but not secured in any way, sat Mrs. Archibald Garnett. She appeared to be more indignant than alarmed.

"This is a nice way to treat a lady, isn't it?" she asked him sarcastically. "I've been here for what seems like hours, and I can't make head or tail of what these fellows are driving at."

Archie grinned as reassuringly as he could.

"How did you get here, to begin with?"

"You'll hardly believe it"—her tone dared him not to—"but I was sitting in my room at Mrs. Tann's, as peaceful as you please, mending, well"—she coughed delicately—"you being a married man, leastways a widower, it doesn't matter saying to you, it was undergarments, when the floor began to move up." She paused dramatically.

"The floor?"

"Yes. Leastways, it looked like it. I sat and gaped, like a fool, and up comes a head. One of them." She nodded towards the two Chinese who were standing, watchful and inscrutable, at the end of the room. "In he comes, and then the other, and before you could say 'Knife' they claps a pillow-case over my head, and with pushing and dragging and carrying, I finds myself here."

"But what did they bring you here for?"

"Now you're asking."

"Do you mean to tell me that there's a passage from this place, and a trap-door into a room at Mrs. Tann's?"

"There certainly is. What their game can be beats me. This looks like a proper laundry." She gazed round approvingly. "Them serviettes, now. I couldn't have ironed 'em better myself."

"Have the Chinks frightened you? Did they threaten you at all?"

"Oh, I I'm all right." Her look was scared and helpless. "But I don't like the way they stare and say nothing. Then I heard your voice and shouted at you to go away, but I might have known that that was just the thing to bring you in."

"Of course I came in. One of those fellows said that there was a lady here who had hurt herself, and directly I recognized your voice I was certain that you were in difficulties. If you think that I was going to leave you in the lurch, Mrs. Garnett——"

"Could you manage to call me Gladys? I'd not feel so lonely-like, and my husband and you being cousins——"

"Rather! And you must call me by my name."

"Cousin Gilbert? It sounds awfully familiar, seeing you're a bishop."

He smiled in dissent before his attention was distracted by the two Chinese. They came forward and stood one on either side of his chair, wordless, malignant, menacing, without pity or scruple. His bound arms writhed uneasily. Free, he could have sent his fist crashing into that yellow mask nearest to him. . . .

"They didn't win no prizes in a beauty competition, did they?" Mrs. Garnett giggled nervously.

The scarred Chinese spoke.

"You know what we want."

"I haven't the faintest idea." Archie shook a protesting head. "Look here, will you kindly let this lady go home, and explain exactly why you've tricked me into coming here? This is a bit thick in a civilized country."

"You give us what you have, and you and she go."

"But what is it? Why can't you tell me plainly? Is it money?"

They shook their heads. "You know what it is."

"I swear I don't. I suppose you're heathens? Well, tell me the name of your particular god, and I'll take my oath on him that I'm completely in the dark. Savvy?"

"I can't make them out," Mrs. Garnett interposed uneasily. "I was set down in this chair, and the pillow-case left on, and I could hear them two moving about in my room. Then they felt all over me with their horrid yellow hands, but whatever it was they were after I hadn't got it."

"But why should they think you or I had?"

"Dunno, unless it's because we both come from foreign parts."

Archie strained his arms. The cords might have grown there, so tight, so immovable did they feel.

"If you no tell us, we make you." The sinister whisper chilled his blood.

"How can I tell you when I haven't a blessed notion what you're driving at?"

The unscarred man spoke for the first time.

"Do you want to die, like that fool, her husband, or that other fool, your wife?"

"Ain't they polite?" sarcastically inquired Mrs. Garnett.

Archie paid no heed. He had learned the truth at last. These two had killed Gilbert and Laura Gifford. Would they kill him and Mrs. Garnett too?

"You know he die?" The black eyes, four in number, were fixed

upon Archie's face. "Allee town wonder why. You know why. He would not give us what is ours."

"But what the deuce is that? Look here"—he spoke casually, although he realized the dire peril in which he and this woman were placed—"you say that you killed those other two because they wouldn't give you something that belonged to you. Had they got it, either of them?"

"No." The faintest smile creased the yellow countenance near him. "You have it."

"I swear I can't make out what you're driving at. Can't you tell me plainly?"

From the recesses of his robe (both wore Chinese dress) the scarred man drew forth two objects. Archie craned his neck to see. He gave a sharp exclamation. One was the stone which had ornamented the lost ring. The other, precisely similar, had no doubt decorated Mrs. Garnett's dagger. They lay on the Chinaman's yellow palm, round, brownish circles, about the size of a woman's thumb-nail.

Archie shook his head. "But those things are no value. They look just like pebbles. In any case you've got them. Are there more? If so, I haven't any."

The Chinese wordlessly restored the stones to their hiding-place and beckoned his colleague aside. They conferred for a few minutes before going over to a corner of the room. Some contrivance for heating irons stood there. Both busied themselves with it whilst the eyes of the man and woman, their victims, met in grim despair.

"If only you weren't here!" A smothered oath burst from Archie. "I—I could stick it for myself, but to be trussed up like a fowl in this damnable fashion and not able to stir a finger to help you——" He writhed uselessly.

"The children's provided for." Mrs. Garnett was apparently thinking aloud. "I've left my bit of money in equal shares to the three, and they've got good relations to look after them. My sister and brother-in-law has none of their own, and the last thing she said to me when seeing me off was: 'Well, cheerio, Gladys, and if anything happens to you, which we'll hope it won't, but it's best being prepared for everything, Bob and me'll be father and mother to the kiddies.' Real kind, Belle always was, but—but"—her eyes filled with tears—"Beatrice isn't two, and an aunt's never the same as a mother, say what you like."

"Mrs. Garnett—Gladys, for pity's sake don't. You'll see them again, I hope and believe. Those devils wouldn't dare to kill us."

"They've killed my husband and your wife already. We know too much for them to let us go now." Mrs. Garnett bravely fought back her sobs. "Don't so much matter about me, 'cept for the children, but it's an awful shame if a nice gentleman like you, and a bishop, is nipped in the bud, so to speak."

"Perhaps I shan't be." He strained savagely at his bonds.

"I might manage to get out of the room and yell for help." Mrs. Garnett spoke softly. "It's a bit hard on the two of us, happening

just when things was brightening up a bit after both our marriages turning out such a wash-out."

The scarred Chinese came forward, a glowing iron in his hand. He passed the woman and walked noiselessly over to the man. The scarlet thing of horror and unspeakable anguish was a few inches from the helpless victim's eyes. Mrs. Garnett lost her self-control and screamed.

The headlong apparition of a replica of her husband and 'Cousin Gilbert' dashed in. He was dressed as a bishop. This much she saw before she fainted. Sitting up dizzily a few seconds afterwards she found the room full of clergy and police—O blessed sight!—and her late tormentors being briskly handcuffed by the latter. They made no sign, did not struggle, merely accepting the situation with disdainful, impregnable, Oriental calm. Miss Fenchurch was there too, weeping over "Cousin Gilbert", and tugging fiercely at his bonds.

The Bishop reached the scene first. This was indisputable. Peggy always maintained that she would have been next but for the ungentlemanly conduct of Mr. Egerton and Mr. Spencer. They actually put her aside and tore after the Bishop. The inner door, old and warped, yielded easily to the combined assault of the Church Militant. The police and Zackery Tann followed, and Peggy declared indignantly that everybody was far more interested in arresting those two horrid Chinese than in releasing her poor darling Archie.

"They haven't hurt you? They didn't dare?" she sobbed wrathfully.

"Not a bit. You were just in time, though. Buck up, old girl! Borrow somebody's knife, will you, and I'll be as right as rain. Hullo! Gladys has toppled over. Don't wonder. Get her outside, darling, and go yourself. This is no place for a woman."

"I suppose you bring a charge of assault and intimidation against these men, sir?" Inspector James looked curiously at the man whom he knew as the Bishop of Wurrumpoopa.

"Yes, but it's more serious than that." Archie stretched his cramped arms. "The charge is Wilful Murder. They confessed to this lady and myself that they murdered her husband, Archibald Garnett, and—and Mrs. Gifford."

"Is that so, ma'am?" The inspector turned to Gladys Garnett.

"They boasted about it to the Bishop and me, sir. I've no doubt it's true."

She turned to Peggy when the inspector was giving directions for the removal of the prisoners. "Who's the other gentleman, dear?" she whispered. "My! he *is* like the Bishop."

"He is the Bishop," Peggy whispered back.

"Lor'! Then who's——?" Her nod indicated Archie.

"My fiancé, Mr. Garnett."

"Well then, it must have been my husband who was murdered." Mrs. Garnett's tone held no regrets. "It'll be a relief to have who murdered who settled." She bridled. "It really wasn't fair to Someone

Else to keep him waiting indefinitely," she intimated coyly, "and as long as there was any doubt——"

Peggy trembled. Had Archie made a rash promise to marry Mrs. Garnett if they both escaped alive from this den? How did she come to be here? Zackery Tann had made no mention of her.

The two Chinese, strongly guarded, were removed in a taxi to Broadcaster jail. The Bishop turned to the two young clergymen, both hatless, grimy, with crumpled collars and streaked faces. Heartily he shook a hand of each.

"I am exceedingly indebted to you, Mr. Egerton. But for your friendly lift we might not have got here in time to avert a tragedy. You are wasted in a country curacy. Have you ever considered work in the Foreign Mission field?"

Mr. Egerton's dirty face glowed. "It—it's been my dream, my lord," he stammered.

"Well, think over coming back to Wurrumpoopa with me. I can promise you it won't be an easy life." He turned to the other. "Mr.—er——?"

"Spencer, my lord."

"I was inclined to be excessively annoyed with you, Mr. Spencer, for the unauthorized way in which you brought a young lady into dangers of this kind. Now, don't trot out Adam's excuse and say she asked you." He grinned. "I'll overlook a good deal for the style in which you laid out that chap with the scar. You are just what we want in Wurrumpoopa. You had better join Egerton. By the way, whose is the motor-cycle you rode here?"

"I—I've no idea, my lord. I just borrowed it."

"Then I should recommend you to put it back and apologize to the owner. Make my apologies to Bishop Begbie, Mr. Egerton, for depriving him of his chaplain. I hope you will both be in time for the second Evensong. Good-bye."

When they had gone, laughing, reluctant, compensated by Peggy's thanks and the grateful tears in Peggy's beautiful eyes, the Bishop turned to his cousin.

"Well, Archibald?"

"Gilbert! Is it your ghost, or am I dreaming?"

"Neither, old chap. Come with me to the jail to see those fiends locked up, and I'll explain everything as far as I can."

CHAPTER XXVII

PEGGY CARRIED MRS. GARNETT back with her to the vicarage. On the way she heard all particulars of the ordeal through which the widow and Archie had passed. An unspoken act of quiet heroism by the woman raised her to a high pinnacle in Peggy's estimation.

They walked up the steps firm friends for life. To Peggy's unspeakable wrath, as she was groping for her latch-key, the vicarage door was opened by Mr. Teal.

In the engrossing events of the last two hours she had totally forgotten her sister. Her gorge rose at the sight of the destroyer of a happy home. How had the creature the brazenness to reappear? Had Ethel, too cowardly to come herself, sent him back to fetch her things? She had taken nothing but her outdoor garments with her.

Peggy walked past him without a word. "Come into the drawing-room, Gladys, and I'll see about tea for us," she told Mrs. Garnett. "Are you sure you won't lie down?"

"Quite, thanks. This arm's nothing much. A cup o' tea'll set me up a treat."

"Don't make a row, please." Mr. Teal, tiptoeing after them, interposed familiarly. "I've tucked Mrs. Singleton up on the drawing-room sofa, and I hope she may have dropped asleep."

Peggy turned. Her look withered him. "I suppose she's changed her mind, thought better of it, and got you to bring her home?" she said fiercely.

"Of course I brought her home." Mr. Teal struck a manly attitude. "She was fagged out, poor dar——er——poor lady. As for 'thinking better of it', she was most plucky, said she'd have both out at the same time——"

Peggy wrung her hands. "Both what?"

"Why, her teeth, naturally." Mr. Teal wore a becomingly injured air. "I don't understand what you're driving at, Miss Fenchurch. Mrs. Singleton has had raging toothache, so I offered to take her to the dentist, and I've just brought her back a few minutes ago. She ought to have some tea and not be worried." He capered to the kitchen stairs, singing a snatch from a popular song of the 'seventies. "Oh, Ruby, my Da-a-rling——"

"She's out. You're serenading an empty kitchen." Peggy suddenly felt unspeakably light-hearted. "Go down yourself and start the kettle, there's a dear."

Mr. Teal gasped. The stately Miss Fenchurch calling him a dear!

"I say!" Ardently he advanced towards her.

"Don't." She laughed and evaded him. "Gladys, are you too shaky to put on a kettle while I just peep at Ethel? You're a nice domesticated soul, I know. Oh, and find some liniment, will you, Mr. Teal? Mrs. Garnett's got her arm burned."

She slipped into the drawing-room. Ethel, drawn and pale of face, but undoubtedly on the road to recovery, sat up at her sister's entrance. Peggy flew to her and hugged her.

"Oh, Ethel darling, I'm so thankful to see you back again!"

"But you knew where I'd gone. I left a note to tell you." Ethel frowned pettishly. "Didn't you find it, Peggy? Well, it was very stupid of you when I propped it up by the clock as I always do with messages. It's gone, anyway. I've had a frightful time, and I'm sure I'd never have got home alive if it hadn't been for Mr. Teal."

Peggy gave way to hysterical laughter. "Oh, Ethel, and I thought that you'd eloped with him. I did get your note, and it said: 'Am going with Stephen Teal'——"

"To the dentist's," finished Ethel firmly.

"No, that part was so smudged that I couldn't read a word of it. Naturally I concluded that you'd run away together. I was frantic."

Ethel drew herself up.

"Well, all I can say is that you might have had a better opinion of your sister, Peggy Fenchurch. The idea of jumping to conclusions like that! As if I, a clergyman's wife, and the mother of two children, would go off with a boy younger than myself, just because he has a handsome face." Mrs. Singleton sniffed indignantly.

"I—I thought you admired him."

"So I do, but if you think I'd fancy a thing like that after being married to *Hugh*." The love and pride in her voice as she spoke her husband's name made Peggy only sorry that the vicar was not present to hear.

"But Gil—— Somebody saw Mr. Teal in Thorpe to-day."

"We had to go to Thorpe. Mr. Branscombe" (the Broadcaster dentist whom the Singletons patronized) "wasn't in. He'd gone off inspecting school-children's teeth, poor little wretches. I was in such pain that Mr. Teal kindly taxied me to Thorpe and tried to find Hugh, but he was out for a walk somewhere with Canon Bottomley. The dentist took out one tooth and wanted me to come again about another, but I said no, I'd have it done now, and of course it took longer." She lay back, closing her eyes. "I'm half dead. Where have you been, Peg?"

"At Thorpe, Ethel. I've got a shock for you, but it's rather a nice one. Archie's alive."

"Nonsense, Peggy! He was murdered." Ethel stared apprehensively. What terrible delusion had taken possession of her poor sister?

"That was another man. We think he must have been Mrs. Garnett's husband."

"Then Archie—your Archie? Quick, Peg!"

"He—he's been Gilbert. The real Gilbert turned up in Thorpe to-day, and frightened the wits out of me. I thought he was a ghost."

"Then has Archie—the real Archie—been masquerading as Gilbert? Oh, Peggy! And I believed he was blackmailing you because you might have had something to do with Archie's murder."

"How horrid of you! Your own sister! Well, we're quits, as I thought that you'd run away with that Teal." They hugged one another. "Oh, and it's discovered who did the murders. Those horrible Chinese who kept the laundry in Wharf Street. They nearly murdered Archie to-day, but Gilbert and—er—other people got there in time." She stood up. "Oh, here comes tea, thank goodness. You and Mr. Teal are bricks, Gladys. Don't bother to sit up, Ethel. I'll pour ont, and I want you to be very nice to Gladys because she saved

Archie's life to-day. Gladys, if you contradict me again about that, I shan't put any sugar in your cup."

The Bishop of Wurrumpoopa, Archie Garnett, Hugh Singleton (specially summoned back from Thorpe), Ethel, Peggy, Gladys Garnett, and Mr. Teal (this last uninvited), collected round the table in the vicarage dining-room to talk over the mystery. Mr. Teal, slightly abashed under the stern eye of the real bishop, was cursing his own denseness. How could he have been so deceived? Yet the likeness, now that the faces were seen together side by side, was amazing, defying detection. . . .

"We'd better begin at the beginning." The Bishop, so to speak, took the chair. "I should like to hear your story, Archibald."

"Well"—Archie was unashamedly clasping Peggy's hand—"I met you in Sydney, and you told me that Hugh and Ethel were married, not Hugh and Peggy. Of course that decided me to bolt home at once, and we fixed up to travel together. There was a rotten strike on, so we weren't able to get a boat for a fortnight. I saw nothing more of you until the night before we sailed. Then you—or I supposed it was you—turned up to dinner at my hotel. Naturally I never suspected any fraud. You suggested our exchanging names and identities."

"On what grounds?" The Bishop folded his long hands on the table.

"You said you had enemies." Archie grinned. "I took it on for a lark." He groaned. "If I'd only known! Then you, or this double, insisted on the deception being kept up for my first evening in Broadcaster. I read your sermon on the Prodigal Son, Gilbert."

"A very appropriate subject." The Bishop smiled wryly. "Pray continue."

"This other chap was found murdered, and identified as me. He had my cards, my clothes, my cash—everything. Peggy and I suspected that Mrs. Garnett, senior—not you, my dear"—he bowed to Gladys—"had done it, or had a hand in it, so I kept on with the bishop stunt for safety. Now you turn up, Gilbert, so we'd better have your version."

"I met you in Sydney, and we arranged to go home." The Bishop's face clouded. "It was necessary to send my unfortunate wife back to England. I went to Melbourne for—er—a business matter during the fortnight that the shipping strike held us up." Archie remembered Mr. MacScrew and hid a smile. "I returned to Sydney and saw her and her nurse off in the *Australian Star*. She took some of my personal belongings with her which were sent to be kindly housed by my friend the Dean of Wimbledon. Two days before the *Kangaroo* was due to sail I received a message that a dying sailor wanted to see a clergyman. Of course I went at once. It was a low neighbourhood, and I was struck on the head and regained consciousness days afterwards in a Sydney hospital."

"Poor Gilbert!" The sympathetic whisper came from Ethel.

"My clothes had gone, also my luggage. I was found dressed in extraordinary lay garments. I had great difficulty in proving my identity." His voice shook. "As soon as I was able to travel I came home, and the voyage has entirely restored my health, thank God."

"But what I can't understand"—Archie drew his brows together—"is who this other chap can have been, and what was his game. How did he come to know so much about our family, Gilbert, and Broadcaster, and intimate things which diddled me into thinking he was you as much as the likeness."

Peggy uttered a groan. "There's a ring, and it's Ruby's evening out. Some wretched parishioner to worry Hugh. Don't go on till I come back." She ran out of the room.

The company round the table heard a woman's voice, then hers answering, finally approaching footsteps. Peggy, wearing a slightly disgusted expression, ushered in Mrs. Garnett of Broadcaster Manor. As usual she was beautifully dressed. Wade followed.

"She *would* come in." Peggy exchanged grimaces with her fiancé.

"Well, Gilbert?" Mrs. Garnett nodded easily to her husband's nephew and ignored the rest. "You look considerably the worse for wear," she told him. "Good evening, Archie. I congratulate you on the way in which you played the Bishop. I confess that at first you took me in completely."

Archie and Peggy regarded one another with rueful faces. Was it possible that the farce, so nearly ending in a tragedy, had been acted for nothing?

"I began to have my suspicions the evening that you met Wade in a train and drove her home." Mrs. Garnett coolly looked round for a seat. "That was so totally unlike Gilbert. Then you were always in Peggy's pocket, which made me more suspicious still. I knew that Gilbert, a married man, would never make love to Peggy." She smiled wickedly. "At last I met you both one evening in Acacia Road. I got my first good look at you then, Archie, and felt almost sure, but to be quite certain, after our pleasant parting I stopped round the corner and heard the rest of your conversation. It was quite amusing wondering how long you would manage to keep the deception up."

The Bishop, after one stern, searching glance at his aunt, had quietly shaken hands with Wade and drawn her to a seat. She perched on the edge, the picture of misery and embarrassment. Mrs. Garnett went on:

"Your keeping away from me was far more like yourself. Gilbert would have marched straight up to the house and talked to me for the good of my soul——"

"I should only have entered your house—part of the inheritance of which I consider that you robbed your stepson—once, in order to tell you my opinion of your conduct." The Bishop's voice sounded so stern, so terrible, so accusing, that even the callous woman quailed. "I did not believe that there was a human being living capable of

your baseness. You deliberately aimed at spoiling Archibald's and Elisabeth's lives."

"And I did you out of a legacy from your uncle, though I never meant to." Her spite goaded her to the admission.

"Ah! you told him of my marriage, I presume?" His voice did not falter.

"Not exactly." Her tone was caressing, purring, like a tiger gathering for a spring. "I told him that Archie had married Laura Wade, and that you performed the ceremony."

She lay back in her chair, smiling at her stepson. He had sprung to his feet, words thick upon his lips. "I—I never saw her in my life until just before she—she——" he stammered furiously.

"I know you hadn't. That didn't matter. Perhaps you remember as a boy of nineteen staying with Gilbert at that East End parish where he went as curate?"

"I remember quite well." It had been a purgatorial experience.

"I told my husband that it had happened then. You had got the girl into trouble, and Gilbert made you marry her. That was why he tied the knot." Her teeth gleamed.

Hugh Singleton interposed. "And on the strength of this Mr. Garnett altered his will?"

"Oh, he asked Wade first. He didn't quite rely on my word. He sent for her to inquire was it true that a member of his family was married to his housekeeper's sister." The drawl in her voice added to its insolence. "Naturally Wade thought that he meant Gilbert, so said yes. He died a week after signing his new will. Archie was away, but in any case his father would never have spoken of the marriage or acknowledged it. He was the proudest and most obstinate of men. Archie's the same. Look how he never wrote to Peggy after he believed that she was married. Of course being engaged to her made his conduct seem worse to my husband." Mrs. Garnett added complacently: "He left him and Gilbert both out of his will, although I argued that Gilbert had done nothing. That was another reason why I wanted Archie never to come back to Broadcaster. I was always afraid that he'd find out why he'd been disinherited. My husband might have told someone, or left it in writing."

Archie looked at her with fierce dislike. "And my father died thinking that of me," he muttered.

He sat for a while with bent head. The news had been very bitter to him. Even the clasp of Peggy's fingers, warm and sympathetic, seemed alien, uncomfortable.

Mrs. Garnett, pricked despite even her tough skin by the collective abhorrence with which the room seemed to regard her, rose.

"Well, I'm going. I just looked in for a peep at Gilbert and Archie *together*. They told me in the town that 'Mr. Archie wasn't murdered and had come back'." A smile suddenly bared her teeth. "I wish it had been you, and not this other man!" she told her stepson fiercely.

He did not deign to answer her as she swept towards the door.

The Bishop addressed her coldly. "If you have no objection, I should like a few minutes with Wade?"

"So far as I'm concerned Wade has no engagements." Mrs. Garnett halted for a moment on the threshold of the room. "I gave her a month's notice recently, but she needn't wait for the time to be up. You can come to Broadcaster Manor this evening, Wade, to fetch your things," she informed her.

Wade struggled with tears as the door slammed. Through them she became aware of arms thrown round her, of sympathetic faces, and a clamour of kind voices in argument. Miss Peggy was hugging her and assuring her that everything would be all right. Someone else (she thought it was the vicar) was calling Mrs. Garnett a she-devil. Mr. Archie, furious at such cavalier treatment dealt out to an old and valued servant of the family, was wringing her hand and telling her not to worry. "We'll look after you, Wade. Miss Peggy and I are going to be married immediately, and you shall come out to Australia with us."

Mrs. Singleton interposed indignantly. "Well, really, Archie, I call that a little too cool. Wade is coming here, of course." She caught the woman's trembling hands. "You know how fond you were of my father, Wade, and of me as a small girl, and the vicar always. You used to say that if anything would persuade you to leave Broadcaster Manor it would be to look after 'Miss Ethel's' babies. Do, Wade. Ruby's enough to drive one crazy, and when Miss Peggy marries I'll be lost without her. Tell her she must, Hugh."

The Bishop's deep voice interposed.

"I think that you are all a little premature, my dear Ethel. Wade is, I hope, coming to Wurrumpoopa to look after me."

He held out his hand to her. She clasped it, murmuring that everyone was too good. "If I could be of some use to you, my lord——"

"Don't call me that. Remember you were Laura's sister." An awkward silence fell upon the room at the words.

"That's just it, my lord." Wade's voice was low and firm. "I couldn't take advantage of that having been the case. If—if I might come as your housekeeper, and do your mending, and—and see to the servants, I'd be more than content. I've kept my place too long to wish to alter things."

"We'll settle that later. You must have a good rest and change, and come out to me after both. You'll be invaluable." He laughed. "I'm scared to death of my native cook."

Wade smiled and dried her eyes. "I'm sorry about the will," she murmured. "I never thought that my telling Mrs. Garnett of the marriage would do such harm. She—she was a kind mistress in those days, and I couldn't have believed that she'd work so much mischief." She sighed.

"That's past and done with," Archie broke in masterfully. "Don't bother about it, Wade. I'm only sorry the old man died thinking so badly of me." He paused and added: "What I want to know is, who

was the chap that those Chinks knifed—and why. Gladys's husband, of course, but who else?"

"I think I can tell you, Mr. Archie." Wade looked over at him. "It was your cousin—a cousin that I'll wager you've never heard of."

CHAPTER XXVIII

"IT WASN'T KNOWN in Broadcaster, sir," Wade went on, "but Mr. Garnett, your father, had a younger brother. He was very wild and reckless, and at last there was a scandal at the works. Something very bad about money. Mr. Garnett told me this when I was keeping house for him after your mamma died, and said he had sent his brother off to Australia, and threatened him with prison if he ever dared to show his face in England again."

She halted, and then took up her tale afresh.

"He never did, but he married out there, and had one son. He was named Archibald Everard, the same as you, Mr. Archie, and after the same person, your grandfather, who founded the works. He had heard all about his father's family, and you may be sure had a very different version of his father's reasons for living in Australia. Mr. Garnett paid his brother an allowance, and after he died continued it to the son on condition that he never tried to come home. He was very angry that Mr. Garnett left no provision for him in his will, and he turned up about six months after the master's death. You were in Australia by that time"—she nodded at Archie—"but Mrs. Garnett saw him. I was in the room, and he was the living image of you and the Bishop. I'm beginning to think that it must have been he who took the Bishop's place and got murdered."

Gladys Garnett interposed here. "Sounds like my husband. He always had a tale of rich relations in England, and being diddled out of a fortune. I bet he didn't get anything from that virago who was here just now."

Wade nodded. "Mrs. Garnett just laughed at him and wouldn't give him a farthing. He hung round the neighbourhood for a bit, but we saw no more of him."

Archie exclaimed: "Of course that was how he'd learn all about the family that he didn't already know from his father. But what made him so anxious to come home a second time, in disguise, and why did those Chinks murder him?"

"Why did they try to get hold of you to-day?" Hugh Singleton asked. "It was to tell them where something was, you said."

Archie nodded. "Yes, but neither Gladys nor I had the foggiest idea what the 'something' could be. After a lot of palaver one of them fished out the pebbles, or whatever the stones were, that used to ornament that ring you wore, Gilbert, and the dagger you sent Mrs.

Garnett. Whether they were intended as a pattern, or to refresh our memories——”

“But Gilbert said that they were quite valueless.” Peggy leaned forward. “You told me to-day, Gilbert, that they were the eyes of some idol you broke up.”

“Of course I broke it up, Elisabeth.” The Bishop’s own eyes flashed. “‘Thou shalt have none other gods but ME.’” He put his hand in his pocket and drew out a little battered object resembling a box. “These smaller pebbles were inside the idol, and I brought them away with me as well.”

The voice of Mr. Teal, hitherto silent, was suddenly heard in the land. “Might I see them, my lord?” He tilted out a stream of brownish stones, each about the size of a small pea. “By Jove!” he exclaimed. “I do believe—— Mrs. Singleton, may I get a saucer of warm water and a rag?”

He darted away. When he returned he took one of the “pebbles”, washed it tenderly, and wiped off the moistened coating. He held the thing out on the palm of his hand. . . .

“A pearl!” breathed Peggy. “Oh! Oh! Are they real, Mr. Teal?”

“You bet—and priceless.” Mr. Teal continued his treatment with the remaining gems. “Unless I’m very much mistaken, this is the necklace that the native women gave Lady Farthingale when her husband was resigning the governor-generalship of Wurrumpoopo. You remember her, my lord?”

“Remember her?” The Bishop’s voice shook. “She was my right hand. I never think of her without asking God to bless her. What she did for the women of Wurrumpoopo is incalculable. And I—I’ve been in possession of her necklace all this time!”

He sat, sunk in thought, his face working. Suddenly he started up. “Come with me, Archibald. I’m going to have a talk with those Chinese chaps. We must get to the root of this.”

When the two returned, some hours later, the Bishop’s face was grimmer and paler than before, and Archie’s high spirits had fallen. They sat down at the table in their old places, the Bishop remarking gravely: “I think we have fairly cleared up everything at last.

“You may not, any of you, remember the burglary at the Residency at Wurrumpoopo,” he went on, “but it made a tremendous local sensation. No doubt you will recall it, Archibald, and you appear to, Mr. Teal?”

Archie nodded. Stephen Teal replied that he had been working for a Brisbane newspaper which wanted the thing written up.

“It was the time that Lord and Lady Farthingale had a lot of presentation stuff stolen, wasn’t it?”

The Bishop inclined his head. “He was extremely popular, and she was very much beloved. His resignation and departure through ill-health were greatly regretted. Both were given a quantity of beautiful and valuable gifts on the occasion of their leaving Wurrumpoopo, and these were stolen and never recovered. Some sports

were to be held, and the prizes—cups and so on—vanished also, but the worst loss was Lady Farthingale's pearls. The necklace was a flawless thing. It had taken years to collect, and was priceless in value. And that's it." He looked tragically at the scattered, maltreated globes.

"The burglary was committed by three Chinese, directed by an Englishman." The Bishop turned apologetically to Gladys Garnett. "I'm afraid that this will be a shock to you," he told her. "It was your husband. Had you any idea?"

She looked up with clear, honest gaze. "I had my suspicions, my lord, but he never told me anything. He'd go away sometimes, quite sudden, and when he came back he always had money. He—he just laughed when I asked how he'd got it, but somehow I never could touch a penny if he offered it to me. I guessed it hadn't been come by honest."

The Bishop's face softened in approval.

"This burglary was a big coup. They got away with the stuff, which was distributed, and gradually disposed of. It was comparatively easy to melt down the silver and get rid of the other jewellery, Lady Farthingale's private collection, but those pearls were the real crux. Garnett hadn't intended to take them. Even if the necklace were broken up they'd be impossible to sell as separate stones. It was Ho-Sing, the scarred Chinese, who pocketed them on his own responsibility. He found them a white elephant, but in the end he hit on a temporary hiding-place where it seemed unlikely that anybody would look for them.

"The chap had had some education, including a smattering of medicine. He had succeeded in getting away into the interior of Wurrumpoopa with those pearls, when he fell in with a cannibal tribe whose chief had damaged his foot. Ho-Sing was able to perform what seemed like a miracle for it, and they insisted on keeping him as an honoured guest. They had an idol, a gruesome thing, and he told them that if they would leave him for five minutes with their god they should see another miracle. They did." The Bishop nodded towards the pearls. "The two largest, which the police have charge of, were fixed into slits that he cut in the idol's head, giving it eyes. He cut another hole in the body and hid the remaining pearls inside."

"And where," inquired his cousin, "do you come in, Gilbert?"

"I'm coming in now, as a receiver of stolen goods." The Bishop smiled. "I was doing a little private exploration outside my diocese when I stumbled across Ho-Sing and this particular tribe. They were—er—acting inhospitably. It seems that they had decided to go farther from civilization than ever, which did not suit their guest. He resolved to rescue his gems and make a bolt for it. Unluckily they caught him, as they considered, robbing their god, so they arranged to eat him, as a lesson. I arrived just as the preliminaries were completed."

"I'd have *flown*." Ethel Singleton shuddered.

"Oh, they did the flying. You see, I have a revolver, which seemed

like a fresh and very dangerous exhibition of magic. In their hurry they left both the Chinaman and the god behind."

Archie laughed. "I hope he was grateful to you." Mr. MacScrew's version of the story suddenly came back to him. The Chinese had not been grateful, but very much the reverse.

"If you consider that gratitude." The Bishop exhibited his scarred finger. "He was pretty extensively damaged, poor beggar, so I proposed getting him to the nearest mission hospital. He nearly bit my finger through when I was trying to hoist him on my back, and as his teeth were not of the cleanest the wound required certain treatment, resulting in this scar. I tied him, gently, as a hint to stay quiet. When I smashed that accursed god into fragments the stones rolled out, so I pocketed them as souvenirs. I—I never dreamed that they were valuable, much less Lady Farthingale's necklace." His voice wavered.

"Of course you didn't, old chap." Archie grinned reassuringly. "Who'd expect to find priceless gems in the belly of a heathen idol?"

The Bishop's face congealed into a mask of horror. "My dear Archibald, that is not a word which we are accustomed to use in the presence of ladies." He coughed. "Er—to continue. I carted my gentleman to the hospital. Not a very easy job, as it was miles, through swamps and undergrowth, and he was swearing and spitting like a cat the whole time. I couldn't imagine why." The speaker shrugged his shoulders. "We were companions in misfortune for a while. My finger didn't heal, nor did his wounds. I—I tried to teach him, thought he was a genuine convert. I baptized him, and brought him with me to Melbourne on one of my visits to—to my poor wife. He disappeared then, and I never saw him again until to-day.

"He must have watched his chance for the pearls, but he never got it. I wore one in the ring which I had made to hide this scar, and the other I had set in the knife that I sent to Mrs. Garnett. These two were the largest and most valuable. Then Ho-Sing came across Garnett again, and they put their wits to work. The other pair of Chinese with their share of the booty had gone to England and opened a laundry. Garnett suggested Broadcaster to them. He and Ho-Sing found out that I was returning home. Garnett was sitting in the veranda of our hotel, Archibald, and overheard all our arrangements. He followed me to Melbourne, back to Sydney, watched his chance, sandbagged me, but found no trace of the pearls, except the one in the ring, on my person or amongst my luggage.

"He decided to take my place and go home. He knew that Ho-Sing had already gone, to see his two confederates, and he believed that he had lied and was in possession of the pearls all along. Ho-Sing landed a week before you and Garnett did, Archibald, went straight to his friends, and took the place of one of them, who was very glad to go with his share and be quit of the business.

"Ho-Sing knew nothing of my being laid out and Garnett taking my place, and becoming his cousin, the other Archibald Garnett. Garnett knew that as the Bishop of Wurrumpoopo he hadn't much chance if he ran across the Chinese, who would think that he had the

pearls. He persuaded Archie to assume the rôle, and went to Broadcaster as the Bishop's cousin. From the station he made his way direct to the laundry, was admitted, recognized as himself, and demanded the pearls from Ho-Sing. He had taken the precaution of giving you, Archibald, the ring with the one, and it so happened that the knife with the other came into the possession of the Chinese that very evening.

"Mrs. Garnett, my aunt, had employed them to wash some chintz covers. When she was dressing for church the other Chinese called to return them. He had left Ho-Sing and Garnett arguing furiously, each accusing the other of having secreted the pearls. Ho-Sing believed that Garnett had found them when he sandbagged me (he had just boasted of it), and Garnett didn't believe Ho-Sing's story that I had taken them out of the idol. The other chap, when waiting in the hall to be paid, looked in at the boudoir door, and saw the knife with the twin pearl on a table. It was the work of a moment to annex it, and to take it back to his confederate.

"In the end Ho-Sing killed Garnett. He was sitting down, looking at the knife which the other man had brought in, and Ho-Sing leaned over and stabbed him with a knife that he always carried. Then both put the body, wrapped in a sheet, on the little motor lorry which they used to fetch and return their laundry-baskets, piled it with these, and drove round looking for a spot where they could deposit their victim. It so happened that Mrs. Garnett, who had left the church at the beginning of the sermon, passed them not far from the archway."

Archie and Peggy gripped hands under the table.

"She had come down, dressed for church, to find her chintzes in the hall. She was very annoyed with the Chinese for bringing the parcel back on a Sunday, and said that she would not employ them again. She walked on, they drove away, but they had noticed the archway, and returned to it shortly before eight o'clock. They lifted out the body and laid it where it was soon afterwards found. The evening was wet. Most people were either at supper or in church, and a lucky chance favoured them, so that they were not seen. They drove back to their laundry, burned the sheet which had been wrapped round the body, and went home to their lodgings at Mrs. Tann's."

"Then—then Mrs. Garnett knew nothing about the murder—had nothing to do with it?" Peggy's voice sounded acutely disappointed.

"Nothing. She held her tongue as to having spoken to the Chinese as she didn't want it known that she gave a false impression at the inquest about which road she took coming home. Her motive was to avert suspicion, which might fall upon her if it became known that she was passing the archway just about the time of the crime. She did not suspect the Chinese in the least, and her own hatred of her stepson was universally known. I have seen her," the Bishop added, "and am convinced that she had nothing to do with it. You spoke of a witness, Archibald, who saw her return by the short cut, which alarmed her, as she naturally supposed that it was the Chinese."

"No, it was Captain Campkin. He lives in a cottage on the moor,

and said she looked like a devil as she went by. Detective-story-soaked old ass! And she'd nothing to do with the murder? Well, I'm blessed. Go on, Gilbert."

"You, it appears, missed your ring—my ring—later in the evening. Zackery Tann saw it slip off your finger as you were leaving the pulpit." The Bishop smiled sardonically. "He mentioned this to Ho-Sing when the Chinese invited him to come into their room and see some foreign curiosities. Ho-Sing offered him ten shillings if he would take him to the church and help him to find the ring. He said that it was of no value, and I fear that that boy has not been brought up with Right Ideas of Honesty."

Archie broke in indignantly: "The little beast! Peggy and I went to look for the wretched thing, and he frightened the wits out of us by being in the church. He had some story all pat about having been locked in since Evensong and falling asleep."

"I regret that that was not true. He had found the ring, and Ho-Sing had just got away with it when you and Elisabeth appeared from the vestry."

Peggy looked at Archie. "We heard the side door close," she reminded him.

"Zackery's chief interest in the episode seemed to be that he got his ten shillings." The Bishop grew pensive. "That was that, as—er—schoolboys say. Next came, I understand, a burglary at your house, Archibald?"

Mr. Teal interposed pathetically. "Yes, when I was nearly murdered. Was that that horrible Chinese? I thought it was a woman."

"You heard Ho-Sing's robe rustling, and his hands were soft with laundry work. He mistook you for my cousin, whom he, of course, thought was myself." The Bishop's manner removed Mr. Teal's alarms and injuries to the region where such things were totally unimportant. "His friend ransacked the drawing-room, but naturally found no pearls."

"But what about?"—the vicar hesitated—"your wife's death, Gilbert? Were the Chinese responsible for that?"

"Undoubtedly. They were on the stair under the trap door, and overheard her conversation with her sister, Mrs. Tann. It told them enough to show that she was my wife, and not unnaturally they concluded that I might have given her the pearls." His face worked. "She was taken down to the laundry in the same way that Mrs. Garnett was, late at night or early in the morning, and—and killed because the poor thing could give them no information as to the pearls, and they dared not let her go, any more than Garnett, to betray them. Her body was taken to the archway in the lorry just as—as his was, but the knife used was the one stolen from my aunt. It so happened that a handkerchief belonging to her had been in the folds of the chintz covers which they had washed, and they forgot to return it. Out of revenge for having deprived them of her custom they left it beside the body. Mrs. Garnett was as innocent of that murder as of the first."

"Well, you and I have been a pair of fools, Archie." Peggy

Fenchurch laughed. "All our trouble for nothing, and Mrs. Garnett knew you into the bargain!"

"I know. Sickening, isn't it? And as Gilbert it seems that I was in far greater danger than as myself from Mrs. G."

"Well, I'm very tired of murders and horrors." Ethel shivered prettily. "I want something pleasant for a change."

"And you're going to have it, ma'am." Archie rushed upon his opportunity. "I intend to trot up to town for a special license, and Gilbert shall marry Peggy and me to-morrow."

"Hear! hear!" applauded the Bishop of Wurrumpoopa.

"Well, I'm sure!" Peggy was blushing like a girl of seventeen. "You've got some nerve, Archie. How can I be married to-morrow?"

"Why not? Clothes? Bother clothes! Hands up, those in favour of it." He laughed. "Carried unanimously, Peg. You haven't a chance."

The collective arguments of the company bore down her feeble and half-hearted protests.

"Ethel won't be well enough. She's had two teeth out."

"I'm not marrying Ethel, and a wedding's a tonic. That argument won't wash."

"We've only been engaged——"

"Nine years, eight weeks, and two days. I refuse to wait twenty-four hours longer."

"I think, Peggy dear"—this was her brother-in-law—"that Archie deserves something."

"Jacob served seven years for Rachel." The Bishop smiled across at her. "Archibald has served that, and two over, for his Elisabeth."

"Wade?" Peggy appealed to her prettily.

"I'd say yes, Miss Peggy. Mr. Archie's one in a thousand." The compliment from this quarter was so unexpected that Archie turned crimson as he wrung her hand.

"Gladys?"

"Of course, my dear. Marry early and marry often's my motto."

She spoke so emphatically that everybody turned to look at her. She, too, was blushing.

"Who's the lucky man, Gladys?" Archie asked her, laughing.

"Well, I met him on the ship I came home in." Mrs. Garnett looked down coyly. "Of course, not being certain whether I was a married woman or a widow I wasn't in a position to let him say anything serious, but we understood one another. After I got here, and found how things were, I wrote and told him, and only this morning there came a very proper invitation from his married sister in Wolverhampton to spend a week-end with them. Herbert—that's Mr. Piggot—is to come down for the Sunday, me being agreeable. He's a linen-draper in a good way of business, and thinks it would be a nice honeymoon to go back to Australia and fetch the children. I suppose it was thinking of that distracted my mind, and the next thing was them Chinks coming up through the floor and grabbing me. My!" She shuddered.

"Oh, and that reminds me——" Peggy broke ruthlessly into the congratulations and good wishes being offered to the gratified Gladys. "Do you know what this plucky woman did? You owe your life to her, I believe, Archie. Those brutes wanted her to write a letter to you, asking you to come and see her at Mrs. Tann's, and of course they'd have got hold of you through the trap door too. It was just sheer luck for them that you happened to pass instead. She refused utterly, and they burned her poor arm, and she never said a word about it."

Everybody wanted to shake hands with Mrs. Garnett at the same time, and the women to kiss her. She told Archie to "Go along!" and did not appear to regard herself in the least as a heroine. "My arm'll be well before I'm twice married," she chuckled happily.

"That is settled, then." The Bishop beamed. "You and Elisabeth are to be married to-morrow, Archibald. Hugh and Ethel deserve a holiday, and I shall be delighted to take your duty, my dear Hugh, while you run away for a fortnight or so, and Mrs. Garnett (no, she really must allow me to call her Cousin Gladys) goes to her friends. Capital!"

"And what about Mr. Teal?" Peggy inquired sweetly.

The Bishop replied, and a study of Mr. Teal's face during his remarks amply repaid Archie and Peggy for any unpleasantness endured at that gentleman's hands.

"Mr. Teal is coming back to Wurrumpoopo with me. Between my diocesan correspondence and my—ah—literary work, I find that I require a whole-time secretary. Are you proficient in shorthand and typewriting, Mr. Teal?"

"No, my lord." Mr. Teal's beautiful eyes shot an imploring S O S at Ethel. She took no notice. Whilst waiting at the dentist's Mr. Teal had tried to kiss her, and she was meditating whether she need tell Hugh.

"Then I recommend you to repair the omission before we sail. I shall only take three months' furlough. During that time you will employ yourself with a short but comprehensive course of both, and whilst doing so I shall arrange for you to stay at a Young Men's hostel in Cranford Square. No liquor, no latchkeys, and all inmates are required to be not merely indoors, but in bed, by nine o'clock every night. Be good enough to pack your things, and be in readiness to leave this with me to-morrow afternoon. Oh, and I should be obliged for the address of the establishment where you sold or pawned my gold crucifix."

Mr. Teal rose and, without uttering a sound, faded from the room. There is really no other word to describe his unobtrusive exit.

Archie left off laughing and pointed to the pearls. "What about those, Gilbert? To the best of my recollection there was a thumping reward offered for their recovery."

"I could not touch a penny of it." The Bishop shuddered. "I should feel that I had no right, after practically stealing the things myself." He leant over to Gladys Garnett. "I think it is only fair that you should have it," he told her kindly. "You lost your husband

in a measure through this necklace, and your pluck to-day deserves every recognition."

She accepted, shedding grateful tears. "Only not the whole of it, please. There's the little boy who went to Thorpe to fetch Miss Fenchurch. I'd like him to have a share."

The Bishop's surprise and approval were very evident.

"That is indeed a kind thought. The lad struck me as having Distinct Possibilities. I shall take him away from here, educate him, and start him in a new country, preferably Australia. As my late wife's nephew——"

"As your late wife's husband you'll be expected to pauperize and adopt the entire Tann connection." Archie broke in ruthlessly. "Don't be so green, Gilbert. I had a little chat with Mrs. Tann this evening, when you were at the police station, and I told her that she was jolly lucky not to find herself in the dock with those Chinks."

"But you don't think——? Surely she didn't know anything about——?" The entire company gasped.

"She suspected a good deal about Mrs. Gifford's death, anyway. For one thing, she knew of the trap door, and that it led down to the laundry. She admitted to me that she guessed her sister had left the house by means of it, as the front-door makes such a row she must have heard her if she'd opened it. She showed the police another room, an attic, that she pretended her sister had slept in, so, of course, they never came across the trap door."

"Why did she hate her?" The Bishop asked the question dully.

"Because she came to Broadcaster and gave away your marriage. Mrs. Tann saw her nice private income, obtained by blackmailing you, vanishing, once there was no longer any secret to keep. You cut the whole connection, Gilbert, except Wade and Zackery: that's my advice."

The Bishop's face worked painfully. To distract attention from him, Ethel leaned forward and picked up the little receptacle which had contained the pearls.

"How pretty—if it wasn't painted so crudely. Why, I believe it's only on the surface. Look, it's gilt underneath, and has funny little holes in the lid. Is it a snuff-box?"

"No. A pouncebox." Archie took it triumphantly from her. "I declare it's the one which Marie Antoinette gave to Lady Farthingale's ancestress. They daubed it with stuff to disguise it."

"And I stole that too—a priceless historical relic!" mourned the Bishop. His look was horror-stricken.

"You couldn't know what it was, any more than you could tell that a lot of brown pebbles were a pearl necklace." Archie looked significantly at the culprit. "A *pouncebox*, Gilbert. Curious word!"

Beneath the tan bestowed by the sea voyage the Bishop became a deep and conscious carmine.

"I'm sure I've heard it lately." Ethel was puzzled and excited. "Why, Aubrey Pouncebox, of course. You know, Hugh, the man who writes such delightful novels."

Ignoring his imploring signals for silence, Archie bowed mockingly to the Bishop. "Permit me to introduce you. The Right Reverend the Bishop of Wurrumpoopo *alias* Aubrey Pouncebox."

An indescribable scene followed.

"So that was what you wanted the Teal creature for—to write an Aubrey Pouncebox novel." Peggy laughed until the tears came into her eyes. "Oh, Archie, you poor dear, expected to produce unending best-sellers!"

"I hope your new novel won't take long, Gilbert." Archie grinned at the Bishop. "I got a sum down in advance from your publishers, and most of it's spent. I must pay you back as soon as I can establish my own identity."

"The work is completed, my dear Archibald, and shortly to be in the publishers' hands. The MS. was one of the items of personal luggage which I sent home by the *Australian Star*. I secured it this morning at the deanery of Wimbledon where it had been awaiting my arrival, and despatched it immediately to the typist."

"So that was where it went to. And where were the pearls all the time? You said that Garnett"—Archie glanced apologetically at Gladys—"couldn't find them on you or in your luggage."

"They were in the parcel with the MS." The Bishop spoke meekly. "I slipped the box in at the last minute because it was a tiresome thing in one's pocket, and I brought it with me to-day after I had sent off the MS. I shall be glad to be rid of it," he added viciously.

"I've got a brain wave." Peggy leaned forward beguilingly. "Gilbert dear, can't you pretend that you've been here all along, and that it was Archie who turned up to-day? We must tell the police the real truth, and Mrs. Garnett knows everything, but Archie and I don't want to look fools, especially on our honeymoon."

The Bishop's severe expression was not reassuring.

"It will involve more lying and evasion, Elisabeth. I cannot say that I approve. I am shocked to contemplate the depths of untruthfulness to which you and Archibald descended in order to bolster up this deception."

"Lying's no worse than stealing." Peggy pointed triumphantly to pearls and pouncebox. "I'm afraid you'll have a hard job, Gilbert, persuading people that you didn't really *know* that they were pearls." She kicked her fiancé under the table. "Won't he, Archie?"

"Nearly impossible, I should say." Archie looked very serious. "Everybody will think that you were in league with Garnett and the Chinese, and you might be requested to resign your bishopric."

"There's another thing." The Bishop directed a stern gaze at Peggy which did not conceal a gathering twinkling in his eye. "All Broadcaster, I understand, my dear Elisabeth, expects you to marry the Bishop of Wurrumpoopo. If I agree to this deception in a modified form, you should certainly strengthen it by marrying me. What do you say?"

"The answer, dear Gilbert"—the bride of the morrow blushed and held on to Archie's protecting hand—"as politicians say—is in the negative."



